

ALLAH EXISTS WITHOUT A PLACE

A REFUTATION OF
ANTHROPOMORPHISM

ليس كمثله شيء

THERE IS NOTHING
LIKE UNTO HIM.

(QUR'AN 42:11)

Dr. Yusof Mutahar

Allah Exists Without a Place:

A Refutation of Anthropomorphism

Dr. Yusof Mutahar

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Disclaimer

This work is a theological defence of the orthodox creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah concerning the transcendence (*tanzīh*) of Allah Most High and His absolute freedom from place, direction, bodily form, limitation, and resemblance to creation. The author asserts the moral right to be identified as the creator of this work.

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of Qur'anic verses, Prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*), Arabic citations, theological discussions, and references to classical Sunni scholarship, any shortcomings or errors remain solely the responsibility of the author.

This work reflects the author's independent academic research and presentation of the Hanafi–Maturidi theological tradition, drawing upon the works and methodologies of the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ كَمَا صَلَّيْتَ عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَعَلَى آلِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِنَّكَ حَمِيدٌ مَجِيدٌ

اللَّهُمَّ بَارِكْ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ كَمَا بَارَكْتَ عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَعَلَى آلِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِنَّكَ حَمِيدٌ مَجِيدٌ

O Allah, bestow Your favour upon Muhammad ﷺ and upon the family of Muhammad, as You bestowed Your favour upon Ibrahim and upon the family of Ibrahim. Indeed, You are Praiseworthy, Glorious.

O Allah, bestow Your blessing upon Muhammad ﷺ and upon the family of Muhammad, as You bestowed Your blessing upon Ibrahim and upon the family of Ibrahim. Indeed, You are Praiseworthy, Glorious.

Dedication

This humble work is dedicated to three of the greatest defenders of Islamic orthodoxy and the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah:

To **Imām al-A'zam Abū Ḥanīfah al-Nu'mān ibn Thābit** رحمه الله — the great Imām of jurisprudence, intellect, and disciplined theological reasoning, whose profound understanding of tawhīd, transcendence, and legal methodology laid the foundations for one of the greatest scholarly traditions in Islamic history. Through his preservation of reason anchored firmly in revelation, he safeguarded the religion from extremism, confusion, and theological deviation.

And to **Shaykh Ahl al-Sunnah, Imām Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī** رحمه الله — the architect of orthodox Sunni creed and one of the greatest defenders of Divine transcendence (tanzīh), who upheld the balance between revelation and reason, and whose scholarship protected the Ummah from anthropomorphism, corporealism, and theological excess. Through his efforts, the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah was clarified, systematised, and preserved for generations to come.

And to my **Shaykh, Shaykh al-Islām Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī** رحمه الله — the great reviver and defender of the Hanafi–Maturidi tradition in the modern era, whose fearless scholarship stood as a fortress against literalism, anthropomorphism, and the erosion of orthodox Sunni theology. Through his immense service to the Islamic sciences, his defence of the Imams of guidance, and his unwavering commitment to the creed of transcendence, he revived the intellectual spirit of Ahl al-Sunnah in a time of confusion and division.

May Allah Most High abundantly reward them for their immense service to Islam, illuminate their graves, elevate their ranks amongst the righteous, and allow us to benefit from their knowledge, sincerity, and unwavering defence of the truth.

Āmīn.

“The foundation of tawhīd is affirming Allah without resembling Him to creation.”

— Imām Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī رحمه الله
Kitāb al-Tawhīd

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INTRODUCTION

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of the Worlds. We praise Him, seek His assistance and guidance, and implore His forgiveness. May the most perfect peace and blessings abide upon our master Muhammad ﷺ, his noble family, his righteous companions, and all those who steadfastly follow the path of truth until the Final Day.

The reality of Allah Most High transcends the boundaries of human imagination, and His Divine Essence (dhāt) cannot be encompassed by the finite limitations of the created intellect. Human beings are inherently contingent, limited, and dependent, whereas Allah is Eternal, Absolute, Perfect, and utterly Self-Sufficient. He is entirely distinct from everything besides Himself.

For this reason, the classical authorities of Islamic theology (kalām) warned against delving into speculative imaginings regarding the Divine Essence or interrogating the reality of Allah through the lens of physical modality (kayfiyyah). The righteous scholars recognised that asking “how” regarding Allah, or attempting to conceptualise Him through bodily imagination, represents a serious violation of the intellectual and spiritual etiquette (adab) owed to the Divine Majesty.

In contemporary discourse, the question “Where is Allah?” is often approached through a reductionist literalism that strips the revealed texts of their linguistic depth, theological precision, and transcendent meaning. By contrast, the righteous predecessors (al-Salaf al-Sālih) approached the scriptural texts concerning the Divine Attributes (ṣifāt) with reverence, humility, and complete submission to revelation. Their methodology was firmly anchored upon the foundational Qur’anic principle of Divine transcendence (tanzīh):

“There is absolutely nothing whatsoever like unto Him, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing.”

(Al-Shūrā, 42:11)

Throughout Islamic history, one of the gravest theological deviations has been anthropomorphism (*tajsīm* and *tashbīh*): the attribution of created, physical qualities to Allah Most High. Anthropomorphism reduces the Transcendent Creator to the level of creation by imagining Allah as a corporeal body (*jism*), a physical entity occupying space and confined by direction, movement, dimension, or locality. Such beliefs fundamentally undermine the reality of *tawhīd*.

Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali رحمه الله stated:

“Whoever imagines Allah as a body composed of limbs and organs is worshipping an idol fashioned by his own imagination.”

Likewise, the great verifier and defender of Sunni orthodoxy, Imam Muhammad Zahid al-Kawthari رحمه الله, fiercely opposed corporealist and anthropomorphic tendencies. He repeatedly emphasised that the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah is founded upon absolute transcendence, affirming the Divine Attributes without bodily resemblance, physical modality, or spatial confinement.

This orthodox creed — preserved and transmitted by the jurists and theologians of the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi’i, and classical Hanbali traditions — was systematically codified and defended by the two great imams of Sunni theology: Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi رحمه الله and Imam Abu al-Hasan al-Ash’ari رحمه الله. The consensus of Ahl al-Sunnah affirms that Allah exists without place (*makān*), without direction (*jihah*), and without physical mass, movement, dimension, or limitation.

Allah existed eternally in the pre-eternal past (*al-Azal*) before the creation of the Throne (*al-‘Arsh*), space, time, direction, and all contingent existence. Because He existed when there was no place, His creation of place did not alter His immutable Essence. He did not become dependent upon creation, nor did He become confined within the dimensions He Himself created.

As the greatest Imam of our school, Imam Abu Hanifah رحمه الله definitively states in *al-Fiqh al-Absat*:

“Allah existed eternally and there was no place. He existed before creating creation. He existed when there was no ‘where’ (ayna), no creation, and no thing; and He is the Creator of everything.”

This concise statement establishes one of the greatest principles of Islamic theology: Allah exists without place.

This work is not intended as an exercise in polemics or abstract theological speculation. Rather, its purpose is to clarify widespread misconceptions regarding the Divine Attributes and to reaffirm the pristine creed preserved by the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah throughout the centuries.

Across the following fifteen chapters, this work presents a coherent scriptural (naqlī) and rational (‘aqlī) framework demonstrating that Allah exists free from spatial confinement, bodily occupation, and resemblance to creation. The discussions herein establish that the Divine Essence is exalted above change (taghayyur), movement, localisation, and limitation.

This work also addresses the proper methodology for understanding the ambiguous scriptural expressions (al-āyāt al-mutashābihāt) without falling into the trap of simplistic literalism. Allah Himself states in the Qur’an:

“He it is Who has sent down upon thee the Book. In it are verses clear and decisive — they are the foundation of the Book — and others are allegorical (mutashābihāt). But those in whose hearts is deviation follow that which is allegorical, seeking discord and seeking its interpretation...”

(Āl ‘Imrān, 3:7)

Accordingly, the classical scholars never approached the mutashābih texts through a bodily or corporeal lens. Rather, they understood them according to the principles of the Arabic language, rhetorical usage, and the clear verses affirming Divine transcendence.

Indeed, the Qur'an itself contains numerous expressions which cannot be understood according to simplistic literalism. Allah says:

"Who is it that will give Allah a beautiful loan?"
(Al-Baqarah, 2:245)

No rational believer understands this literally, for Allah is al-Ghani — absolutely free of need. Likewise, Allah says:

"Everything shall perish except His Face."
(Al-Qasas, 28:88)

The scholars never interpreted this as a bodily limb or anatomical feature. Rather, it refers to His Divine Essence or that which is done sincerely for His sake, as understood through the language of the Arabs and the principles of Sunni theology.

Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi رحمه الله devoted his intellectual legacy to preserving this balanced methodology. The Maturidi school represents the vital middle path between those who stripped Allah of His Attributes altogether and those who reduced the Creator to corporeal descriptions.

This work is not a negation of the revealed texts, nor a denial of the Divine Attributes. Rather, it is a defence of the pure creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah. The righteous predecessors affirmed the revealed texts while simultaneously negating bodily resemblance, direction, movement, and modality from Allah Most High. They recognised a foundational truth of theology:

"Whatever enters the mind, Allah is unlike it."

Ultimately, this subject is not merely a dry academic exercise. Sound creed ('aqidah) forms the very foundation of worship, sincerity, humility, and spiritual purification (tazkiyah). A heart that truly understands the absolute transcendence and majesty of Allah is liberated from material imagination and learns to worship the Creator as He truly is: Eternal, Absolute, Perfect, and entirely unconfined by place or creation.

I ask Allah Most High to accept this humble work, to render it sincerely for His Noble Countenance, and to make it a source of benefit for the believers and a means of strengthening the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah upon the path of the great imams of guidance, foremost amongst them Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi رحمه الله.

May Allah allow this work to serve as a humble defence of His Divine transcendence and a protection against anthropomorphism, corporealism, and theological deviation.

And Allah alone grants success.

CHAPTER ONE: ALLAH EXISTED BEFORE ALL CREATION

Among the primary scriptural proofs (adillah naqliyyah) establishing the absolute transcendence (tanzīh) of the Divine Essence is the definitive statement of Allah Most High in Sūrah al-Ḥadīd:

“He is the First (al-Awwal) and the Last (al-Ākhir), the Manifest (al-Zāhir) and the Hidden (al-Bāṭin), and He has full knowledge of all things.”

(Al-Ḥadīd, 57:3)

When subjected to rigorous theological reflection, this singular verse effectively dismantles the foundational premises of corporealism (tajsīm) and hyper-literalism. By declaring Himself to be *The First* (al-Awwal), Allah affirms His pre-eternal existence (al-Azal), meaning He is the Self-Sufficient Being Who existed before the genesis of all contingent things, prior to whom there was absolutely nothing, and whose eternity is entirely free from a beginning.

The Spatial and Temporal Genesis

From a classical Maturidi perspective, it is intellectually imperative to recognise that physical space (makān), direction (jihah), cosmic dimensions, time (zamān), and localised movement (ḥarakah) are not eternal realities. Rather, they are originated phenomena brought into existence by Allah Most High. Before Allah created the celestial Throne (al-‘Arsh), the heavens, the earth, and spatial dimensions, He alone existed in pre-eternity.

Consequently, because Allah existed prior to the creation of place, He existed entirely without a place. Because He existed before the creation of direction,

He existed entirely without direction. This remains an unassailable theological reality: the Eternal Creator cannot be dependent upon, nor confined by, the very spatial and temporal boundaries that He Himself brought into existence.

For this reason, the classical scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah consistently affirmed that Allah exists without localisation or confinement. This orthodox principle is concisely articulated by the founding authority of our legal and theological school, Imam Abu Hanifah (d. 150 AH), in *al-Fiqh al-Absat*:

“Allah existed eternally and there was no place. He existed before creating creation. He existed when there was no ‘where’ (ayna), no creation, and no thing; and He is the Creator of everything.”

This theological position is further reinforced by explicit Prophetic traditions. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ stated:

“There was Allah, and there was nothing else before Him.”
(*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 7418)

In another narration:

“Allah was, and there was nothing besides Him.”
(*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 3191)

These canonical texts establish a foundational principle of tawḥīd: Allah is entirely independent of creation (al-Ghanī), and His existence is completely unaffected by the origination of the cosmos.

The Pitfall of Anthropomorphic Projection

The central error of anthropomorphic thinking (*tashbīh*) lies in projecting the qualities of creation onto the Creator. Human beings are accustomed to physical bodies that occupy space, move through direction, and exist within boundaries. Consequently, some attempt to conceptualise Allah according to these created limitations.

However, because Allah is entirely unlike creation, the qualities inherent to originated things — such as physical limitation, bodily form, movement, confinement, and dimensionality — are impossible (*muḥāl*) to attribute to Him. Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d. 333 AH) explained in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* that attributing the characteristics of originated things to Allah necessarily implies dependency, change, and imperfection, all of which contradict the reality of divinity.

The Divine Name *al-Awwal* carries immense theological significance. If Allah is truly the First before all things, then it is impossible for Him to depend upon a throne, a celestial location, or any directional framework. To argue otherwise would require the claim that space or direction co-existed eternally alongside Allah — a proposition that directly violates the absolute uniqueness of Divine pre-eternity (*al-Qidam*).

Shaykh al-Islam Muhammad Zahid al-Kawthari رحمه الله repeatedly warned against this type of corporealist reasoning, emphasising that spatial confinement and bodily attribution fundamentally contradict the transcendence affirmed by the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the consensus of Sunni orthodoxy.

Divine Immutability and Transcendent Finality

In tandem with being *The First*, Allah also describes Himself as *The Last* (al-Ākhir). While the entire created order is temporary, contingent, and destined to perish, Allah remains eternal, absolute, and unchanged. Allah says:

“Everything shall perish except His Face [His Divine Essence].”
(*Al-Qaṣaṣ*, 28:88)

Because everything besides Allah is transient, the Divine Essence is entirely free from temporal progression, internal change, or spatial transition.

Imam Abu Ja'far al-Tahawi (d. 321 AH) beautifully articulated this cross-school Sunni consensus in his celebrated *al-'Aqīdah al-Tahāwiyyah*:

“He is beyond having limits placed on Him, or being restricted, or having parts or limbs. Nor is He contained by the six physical directions as all created things are.”

The righteous predecessors (al-Salaf) preserved this balance with profound reverence and intellectual humility. They affirmed the revealed texts while negating any corporeal resemblance, bodily modality, or spatial limitation from Allah Most High. This principle was later beautifully summarised by Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH):

“Whatever form or image occurs in your mind, Allah is fundamentally unlike it.”

Ultimately, reflecting upon the verse, “*He is the First and the Last*,” leads the believer to a liberating realisation: Allah’s existence transcends the confines of place, direction, space, and time. He existed eternally before creation without

the slightest dependency, and after bringing creation into existence, He remains exactly as He eternally was — Absolute, Unconfined, and Transcendent.

CHAPTER TWO: THE ABSOLUTE IMMUTABILITY OF THE DIVINE ESSENCE

Among the foundational principles of orthodox Islamic theology is that Allah Most High is eternally perfect, absolutely immutable, and entirely transcendent above change, transformation, progression, or alteration. In classical theology (kalām), change (taghayyur) is recognised as one of the defining characteristics of created things. The Eternal Creator, however, exists in a state of absolute perfection entirely unlike the unstable and changing nature of creation.

Having established that Allah existed in pre-eternity (al-Azal) before the creation of space, time, and the cosmos, it necessarily follows — both rationally (‘aqlan) and scripturally (naqlan) — that the Divine Essence is completely free from change. Change inherently implies contingency (ḥudūth), dependency, and imperfection. For something to change, it must move from one state to another, implying either deficiency in its previous state or limitation in its later state. Such qualities are impossible (muḥāl) to attribute to Allah Most High.

Created Change and Eternal Perfection

Within the created world, all things are subject to transition and alteration. Youth gives way to old age, strength deteriorates into weakness, movement (ḥarakah) turns into stillness (sukūn), and existence itself moves through stages of origination and decay. These continual transformations are signs of dependence and createdness.

Allah Most High, however, is eternally perfect in His Essence (Dhāt) and His Attributes (Sifāt). He does not acquire an attribute after lacking it, nor does

He lose a perfection after possessing it. As Imam Abu Hanifah (d. 150 AH) states in *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*:

“He does not resemble creation in any way, and creation does not resemble Him. He has eternally existed, and eternally exists, with His Names and Attributes. No new attribute is brought into being for Him, nor does any attribute of His experience cessation.”

This reality demonstrates that change is intrinsically tied to created existence and temporal progression. Created beings exist within the sequence of “before” and “after,” whereas Allah is the Creator of time itself and therefore utterly transcendent above temporal succession. Events occur within creation, but they do not produce change within the Divine Essence.

The Ibrahimic Argument Against Cosmic Change

The Qur’an beautifully demonstrates this reality through the argument of Prophet Ibrahim عليه السلام when he reflected upon the celestial bodies:

“When the night grew dark upon him, he saw a star and said: ‘This is my lord.’ But when it disappeared, he said: ‘I do not love those that vanish.’ Then when he saw the moon rising, he said: ‘This is my lord.’ But when it set, he said: ‘Unless my Lord guides me, I shall surely be among the misguided people.’ Then when he saw the sun rising, he said: ‘This is my lord; this is greater.’ But when it set, he said: ‘O my people, indeed I am free from what you associate with Allah.’”

(Al-An‘ām, 6:76–78)

As the classical scholars explain, Prophet Ibrahim عليه السلام was not engaging in uncertainty or experimentation. Rather, he was presenting a rational demonstration (istidlāl) exposing the falsehood of celestial worship. His

argument centred upon the word *āfilīn* (الْأَفْلِينَ), referring to disappearance, setting, transition, and movement from one state to another.

Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d. 333 AH) explains in *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān* that Ibrahim عليه السلام used the setting of these celestial bodies as proof of their dependence, movement, and created nature. Because the stars, moon, and sun were subject to motion and transition, they could not possibly be divine. Whatever changes cannot be eternal, and whatever is not eternal cannot be worthy of worship.

The Impossibility of Movement and Corporeal Attributes

By demonstrating that the divine cannot be subject to disappearance or transition, Prophet Ibrahim عليه السلام effectively negated all physical characteristics from divinity. Consequently, movement (*ḥarakah*), relocation (*intiqāl*), bodily sitting (*julūs*), ascent, descent, and spatial confinement are all impossible to attribute to Allah. Such actions require a body existing within space and moving through time — all of which are qualities of created matter.

For this reason, the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah consistently upheld the famous maxim attributed to Ali ibn Abi Talib رضي الله عنه:

“Allah existed eternally when there was no place, and He is now exactly as He eternally was.”

This profound principle establishes that the creation of the universe did not produce any change within its Creator. Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi rigorously defended this principle against corporealist sects such as the Hashawiyyah and Karrāmiyyah, who attempted to attribute temporal events and physical qualities to Allah under the guise of affirming the revealed texts.

Likewise, Shaykh al-Islam Muhammad Zahid al-Kawthari رحمه الله repeatedly warned that attributing movement, direction, or bodily localisation to Allah ultimately reduces the Creator to the characteristics of originated beings, thereby undermining the transcendence established by both revelation and sound intellect.

The Perfection of Divine Immutability

Ultimately, the absolute immutability of Allah forms one of the foundational pillars of sound belief. If the Creator were subject to change, He would necessarily require something external to bring about that change, rendering Him contingent and dependent. The orthodox creed therefore affirms that Allah is utterly transcendent above movement, alteration, fatigue, limitation, and bodily confinement.

He remains exactly as He eternally was before the creation of the universe — Absolute, Unchanging, and Perfectly Self-Sufficient.

CHAPTER THREE: THE ABSOLUTE INCOMPARABILITY OF THE DIVINE ESSENCE (AL-TANZĪH ‘AN AL-MITHLIYYAH)

A central pillar of Islamic monotheism (tawhīd) is the absolute truth that Allah Most High is entirely unlike His creation. Whatever image, form, shape, dimension, or concept enters the human mind, Allah is fundamentally unlike it. This principle of Divine transcendence (tanzīh) was upheld by the Prophets, the Companions, the righteous predecessors (al-Salaf al-Ṣālih), and the classical scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama‘ah. It was later systematically codified within the theological frameworks of Imam Abu Hanifah, Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi, and Imam Abu al-Hasan al-Ash‘ari. The foundational Qur’anic proof for this creed is the definitive declaration of Allah Most High:

“There is absolutely nothing whatsoever like unto Him, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing.”

(Al-Shūrā, 42:11)

This verse simultaneously establishes Divine transcendence while affirming the reality of the Divine Attributes (ṣifāt). The opening clause employs one of the strongest forms of negation in the Arabic language, categorically denying any similarity, likeness, or comparison between Allah and creation.

Immediately thereafter, Allah affirms that He is *The All-Hearing* and *The All-Seeing*. This demonstrates that Allah possesses real and eternal attributes, yet His attributes bear no resemblance whatsoever to the attributes of created beings. Allah hears, but not through organs, sound waves, or physical mediums. Allah sees, but not through eyes, light, or spatial direction. His attributes are eternal perfections befitting His Divine Majesty.

Ontological Distinction and the Meaning of al-Ṣamad

From a classical Maturidi perspective, resemblance between two things implies some degree of shared structure, limitation, or dependence. Created beings are characterised by bodies, dimensions, colour, form, quantity, movement, and spatial limitation. Anything defined by such qualities is necessarily contingent, originated, and dependent upon an external cause.

Allah, however, is the Creator of matter, bodies, dimensions, and all physical properties. It is therefore impossible for Him to be governed by the laws of His own creation. This reality is powerfully affirmed in Sūrah al-Ikhlās:

“Say: He is Allah, the One. Allah, the Self-Sufficient Master (al-Ṣamad). He neither begets nor is begotten. And there is none comparable unto Him.”

The Divine Name *al-Ṣamad* carries immense theological significance. It refers to the Absolutely Independent and Self-Sufficient Being upon whom all creation depends. Any entity occupying space, composed of parts, or confined within dimensions is inherently dependent upon those very structures and limitations. Such dependency is incompatible with absolute divinity.

For this reason, the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah consistently opposed anthropomorphism (*tajsīm*). Human beings naturally attempt to interpret existence through the framework of physical experience, imagining direction, movement, location, and bodily form. However, Allah is not comprehended through sensory perception or material imagination. As the classical scholars repeatedly affirmed:

“Whatever your mind imagines, Allah is unlike it.”

Navigating Ambiguous Scriptural Expressions: Tafwīd and Ta’wīl

One of the primary causes of anthropomorphic deviation is a failure to properly understand the orthodox methodology concerning the ambiguous

scriptural expressions (al-āyāt al-mutashābihāt). Some literalists insist that every scriptural text must be interpreted according to its most physical and outward meaning, even when such interpretations conflict with the decisive principles of Divine transcendence established throughout the Qur'an.

Allah Most High states:

“He it is Who has sent down upon thee the Book. In it are verses clear and decisive — they are the foundation of the Book — and others are allegorical (mutashābihāt). But those in whose hearts is deviation follow that which is allegorical, seeking discord and seeking its interpretation...”

(Āl ‘Imrān, 3:7)

To preserve the revealed texts while safeguarding Divine transcendence, the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah adopted two orthodox approaches: *tafwīd* and *ta’wīl*.

1. Tafwīd (Consigning the Reality to Allah)

This approach involves affirming the revealed wording exactly as it appears while consigning the ultimate reality and modality (kayfiyyah) of the expression to Allah Most High. The wording is accepted without interpreting it through bodily or physical meanings.

2. Ta’wīl (Interpretive Explanation)

This approach involves interpreting ambiguous expressions according to the recognised principles of the Arabic language and rhetoric, selecting meanings consistent with the clear Qur’anic verses affirming Divine transcendence.

Contrary to the claims of some modern literalists, ta’wīl was not a later theological invention. Interpretive explanation existed among the Companions and early generations themselves. This is clearly demonstrated in the famous supplication of the Prophet ﷺ for Abdullah ibn Abbas رضي الله عنهما:

“O Allah, grant him deep understanding of the religion and teach him the interpretation (ta’wīl).”

(*Musnad Ahmad*, 2397; *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Hībān*, 7055)

Had ta’wīl been blameworthy, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ would never have supplicated for Ibn ‘Abbās to be granted mastery in it.

Using this linguistic and theological framework, many early scholars interpreted certain ambiguous expressions in a manner befitting Divine transcendence. For example, regarding the verse:

“The Most Merciful made istiwā over the Throne.”

(*Tā Hā*, 20:5)

early authorities interpreted *istiwā* as *istawlā* — meaning dominion, authority, and supreme sovereignty — thereby negating any implication of bodily sitting, physical occupation, or spatial confinement.

Similarly, numerous Qur’anic expressions require interpretation according to the conventions of Arabic rhetoric rather than crude literalism. When Allah speaks of a “beautiful loan” being given to Him (2:245), no believer imagines literal need. Likewise, when Allah says:

“Everything shall perish except His Face.”

(*Al-Qaṣas*, 28:88)

the scholars understood “Face” to refer to His Divine Essence, not a bodily limb or physical organ.

By approaching the revealed texts through the principles of language, theology, and transcendence, the Hanafi-Maturidi methodology preserves both the sanctity of revelation and the absolute incomparability of Allah Most High.

Ultimately, the foundational principle of *tanzīh* dictates that Allah Most High exists entirely free from the limitations of time and space. Because space, location, and direction are created entities, Allah existed before creation without a place, and He remains exactly as He has always been. Confining

the Creator to a physical location or direction contradicts His absolute self-sufficiency (*al-Samad*) and reduces the Divine Essence to the level of originated things. By upholding this orthodox creed, the believer affirms a Lord who is infinitely exalted above physical boundaries—existing without a place, yet absolute in His sovereignty, knowledge, and majesty.

CHAPTER FOUR: EXALTATION ABOVE PHYSICAL OCCUPATION AND REST (AL- TANZĪH ‘AN AL-JULŪS WAL-IFTIQĀR)

Among the gravest deviations propagated by historical and contemporary corporealist factions is the claim that Allah Most High physically sits, settles, or occupies the celestial Throne (al-‘Arsh). Such claims fundamentally violate the core principles of Islamic monotheism. Because Allah is the Creator of the Throne, space, direction, and all physical realities, it is both rationally and scripturally impossible for His Divine Essence to depend upon physical sitting, bodily rest, or spatial occupation.

The Impossibility of Divine Sitting and Physical Occupation

From the classical Hanafi-Maturidi perspective, sitting (julūs or qu‘ūd) is not an abstract quality; rather, it is a physical property associated exclusively with created bodies. A body sits due to limitation, fatigue, dependency, or the need for support and stability. Sitting inherently requires bodily form, dimensionality, contact with a surface, and reliance upon the object supporting it.

Whatever rests upon something is dependent upon that support. Such dependency is among the clearest signs of createdness and imperfection.

Allah, however, is *al-Ṣamad* — the Absolutely Self-Sufficient Master:

“Allah, the Self-Sufficient Master (al-Ṣamad).”

(*Al-Ikhlās*, 112:2)

The meaning of *al-Ṣamad* establishes that all creation depends entirely upon Allah, while He depends upon absolutely nothing. To suggest that Allah is physically supported by the Throne introduces dependency into the Divine Essence and reduces the Creator to the level of contingent creation.

Allah Most High further states:

“And indeed, We created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six days, and no fatigue whatsoever touched Us.”
(Qāf, 50:38)

If the creation of the cosmos did not produce fatigue, exhaustion, or weakness, then any notion that Allah required rest, sitting, or physical settlement after creation is categorically false.

Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d. 333 AH) explains in *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* that bodily existence itself is among the clearest signs of originated creation (ḥudūth). Anything composed of parts, confined within dimensions, or restricted to a location necessarily requires an external determiner to specify its boundaries and dimensions. Such qualities are impossible to attribute to Allah Most High.

The Throne Is Created and Cannot Contain the Creator

Anthropomorphic groups frequently interpret the references to the Throne through the lens of worldly kingship, imagining Allah as a ruler physically seated upon a throne. This crude literalism ignores the foundational Qur’anic principle of Divine incomparability.

The Throne itself is created. It came into existence after non-existence through the command of Allah and remains completely dependent upon His preservation. It does not contain Him, encompass Him, or support Him in any manner. Likewise, the angels who carry the Throne do not carry the Divine Essence; rather, they themselves are sustained by the power of Allah.

The orthodox creed therefore affirms the Throne exactly as revelation describes it, while simultaneously negating from Allah all bodily qualities, spatial confinement, and physical occupation.

Understanding the Methodology of the Salaf Regarding Istiwā

One of the most frequently misunderstood statements in this discussion is the famous response of Malik ibn Anas (d. 179 AH) when he was asked regarding the modality of *istiwā*:

“Istiwā is known, its ‘how’ (kayf) is inconceivable, belief in it is obligatory, and questioning it is an innovation.”

In some narrations, the wording appears as:

“The ‘how’ is unknown.”

The scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah clarified that both narrations convey the same theological principle: the complete negation of bodily modality from Allah Most High.

The statement does not mean that Allah possesses a physical mode of sitting hidden from human perception. Rather, it means that bodily modality itself is impossible to attribute to Allah in the first place. The Salaf affirmed the revealed wording while purifying the mind of all corporeal imagination and physical comparison.

Shaykh al-Islam Muhammad Zahid al-Kawthari رحمه الله repeatedly emphasised that attributing bodily sitting, movement, or spatial occupation to Allah contradicts the foundational creed of transcendence upheld by the early generations and the classical scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah.

The Transcendence of Allah Above Space and Dependency

Ultimately, the orthodox creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah affirms that Allah exists completely free from place, direction, bodily form, and physical occupation. He is eternally exalted above sitting, resting, movement, and dependence upon any created reality.

As Imam Abu Hanifah affirmed, Allah existed eternally when there was no place, and after creating place, He remained exactly as He eternally was.

By affirming the revealed texts while negating bodily resemblance and spatial confinement, the believer preserves the majesty of Divine transcendence and safeguards the heart from anthropomorphic projection.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE ABSOLUTE INDEPENDENCE OF THE DIVINE ESSENCE (AL- GHINĀ AL-MUTLAQ ‘AN AL-KHALQ)

A foundational principle of orthodox Islamic theology is that Allah Most High is absolutely self-sufficient (al-Ghanī) and entirely independent of creation. He is neither sustained, supported, upheld, nor carried by anything whatsoever. Dependence is an intrinsic quality of created beings, whereas absolute independence belongs exclusively to Allah Most High. All creation depends entirely upon Him for its existence and preservation, while He remains completely unaffected by creation’s existence or non-existence.

The Meaning of al-Ghanī and al-Ṣamad

This reality is firmly rooted in the Qur’anic declaration:

“Allah, the Self-Sufficient Master (al-Ṣamad).”

(Al-Ikhlās, 112:2)

In the classical Hanafi-Maturidi tradition, the Divine Name *al-Ṣamad* signifies complete and absolute independence from all need. Every created thing possesses limitations and dependencies. Human beings depend upon food, water, air, and countless external causes for survival. Physical bodies require space, structure, and support. The heavens and the earth themselves remain in existence only through the sustaining power of Allah.

Allah Most High, however, is entirely free from all such dependency. He is the Creator of physical force, matter, weight, motion, gravity, and the laws governing the universe. Because He created these realities, it is impossible for Him to be governed by them or dependent upon them.

The Misinterpretation of the Throne-Bearing Angels

Among the common misunderstandings of some literalist groups is their interpretation of verses describing the angels carrying the Throne. Allah Most High states:

“And the angels will be at its sides, and eight will bear the Throne of your Lord above them on that Day.”

(Al-Hāqqah, 69:17)

Some mistakenly imagine from this verse that Allah Himself is physically seated upon and carried by the Throne. Such an interpretation fundamentally contradicts the principles of Divine transcendence and absolute independence.

The Throne (al-‘Arsh), despite its immense grandeur, remains a created object entirely dependent upon Allah. The verse does not indicate that Allah is being physically carried. Rather, it demonstrates the magnificence of the Throne and the immense strength granted by Allah to the angels who bear it.

In physical reality, whatever is carried depends upon its carrier. If the carrier weakens, the carried object falls. Such dependency is impossible (muḥāl) to attribute to Allah Most High.

Allah explicitly states:

“Indeed, Allah holds the heavens and the earth lest they cease.”

(Fāṭir, 35:41)

This verse establishes that the entire cosmos is sustained by the power of Allah, while He Himself requires no support, container, or sustaining force.

The Refutation of Bodily Composition and Spatial Dependency

Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d. 333 AH) explains in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* that anything requiring support, location, dimension, or spatial confinement is

necessarily a body (jism). In classical kalām theology, a body is defined as something composed of parts and dimensions.

Likewise, Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH) explained that composition itself is among the clearest signs of originated creation (ḥudūth), because anything composed of parts depends upon those parts for its existence. Whatever depends upon components cannot be eternal or self-sufficient.

For this reason, the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah firmly upheld the governing Qur’anic principle:

“There is absolutely nothing whatsoever like unto Him.”

(Al-Shūrā, 42:11)

The righteous predecessors (al-Salaf) affirmed the revealed texts while negating from Allah all bodily qualities, spatial confinement, physical dependence, and material composition.

Shaykh al-Islam Muhammad Zahid al-Kawthari رحمه الله strongly emphasised that attributing spatial occupation, bodily form, or physical dependence to Allah inevitably reduces the Creator to the characteristics of contingent creation and undermines the absolute transcendence affirmed throughout the Qur’an.

Absolute Divine Independence

Ultimately, the orthodox creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah affirms that Allah’s independence is absolute and eternal. He gains no perfection through creation, nor would He be diminished by its destruction. The Throne does not elevate Him, creation does not sustain Him, and the universe does not contain Him.

He remains exactly as He eternally was before the creation of the cosmos — Absolute, Independent, and Perfectly Self-Sufficient.

Ultimately, the reality of absolute divine independence (*al-Ghinā al-Mutlaq*) dismantles any theology that seeks to cage the Creator within the physical laws of His own creation. To claim that Allah requires a Throne to sit upon, or angels to carry Him, is to invert the cosmic order entirely. It turns the Sustainer into the sustained and the Independent into the dependent. In classical Sunni metaphysics, the Throne and its angelic bearers do not testify to a God who needs a physical home. Rather, they serve as grand mirrors reflecting His absolute majesty. They are completely dependent upon His command, while He remains entirely free from them.

Therefore, the orthodox believer stands firm upon the pure creed of *Tanzīh*, recognising that space and location are merely tents pitched by the Creator for the benefit of the creation. The Divine Essence remains entirely untouched by the limits of weight, mass, or spatial dependency. Allah Most High did not create the universe to find a place to dwell, nor did He fashion the Throne to find a place to rest. He is now exactly as He was before creation began—the Absolutely Self-Sufficient Master, existing without a place, needing nothing, while everything in existence remains entirely dependent upon Him.

CHAPTER SIX: ABSOLUTE EXALTATION ABOVE LIMITATION AND BOUNDARIES (AL-TANZĪH ‘AN AL-HADD WAL-NIHĀYAH)

A fundamental principle of orthodox Sunni theology is that Allah Most High is absolute, pre-eternal, and entirely exalted above limitation, confinement, boundaries, and spatial restriction. His Divine Essence (Dhāt) cannot be contained by dimensions, directions, physical measurements, or any form of created limitation. Boundaries belong exclusively to created things, whereas Allah is the Creator of all boundaries, dimensions, and spatial realities.

Spatial Limitation and the Nature of Created Things

Everything within creation is defined by limitation and finitude. Physical bodies occupy space, possess dimensions, and exist within measurable boundaries. Material objects have shape, size, quantity, and direction. These characteristics are among the clearest signs of contingency (ḥudūth) and createdness.

In classical kalām theology, occupying a place (makān) is itself a form of confinement. Whatever exists within a location is necessarily restricted by that location. If something occupies one place, it is absent from another. If it exists in one direction, it is excluded from its opposite. This is the unavoidable reality of physical bodies.

A being confined within space is therefore limited, measurable, and dependent upon the very dimensions containing it.

Because Allah Most High is the Creator of space, direction, and dimensional existence, it is impossible for His Divine Essence to be contained within them. As Imam Abu Hanifah (d. 150 AH) states in *al-Fiqh al-Absat*:

“Allah existed eternally and there was no place. He existed before creating creation.”

This concise statement establishes one of the foundational principles of *tawhīd*. Before the creation of the heavens, the earth, the Throne, space, and direction, Allah alone existed in pre-eternity (*al-Azal*). Because He existed before the existence of place, the creation of place did not alter His Essence. He did not become confined within creation after bringing it into existence.

The Maturidi Refutation of Boundaries (*al-Ḥadd*)

Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d. 333 AH) explains in *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* that boundaries (*ḥadd*) are among the clearest signs of createdness. Anything possessing a limit or measurable quantity must necessarily have a particular size, shape, or form distinguishing it from something else.

Mountains possess boundaries. Bodies possess dimensions. Physical objects possess measurable forms. Because such measurements are specific rather than infinite, they require an external determiner to assign them those particular dimensions.

To attribute a boundary to Allah would therefore imply quantity, dimension, and measurable form — all of which belong exclusively to created bodies.

Furthermore, limitation implies dependency. Whatever is confined within boundaries depends upon a space to contain it and dimensions to define it. This directly contradicts the Divine attribute of absolute self-sufficiency (*al-Ghinā*) embodied in the Name *al-Samad*.

The One Who is absolutely self-sufficient cannot be restricted by space, dimensions, or containment.

Transcending Material Imagination

Human beings naturally struggle to conceptualise existence beyond physical limitation because the human mind is shaped through sensory experience. Every created thing encountered in the material world possesses form, dimension, location, and boundary.

Allah, however, is not comprehended through imagination, sensory perception, or material projection. As the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah repeatedly affirmed:

“Whatever your mind imagines, Allah is unlike it.”

Some literalist groups mistakenly claim that denying boundaries and dimensions from Allah amounts to denying His existence altogether. In reality, the opposite is true. Boundaries, dimensions, and confinement are signs of weakness, dependency, and createdness. A body can be measured, divided, confined, and contained — all of which are characteristics of contingent existence.

Allah Most High, however, is entirely free from measurement, division, limitation, and spatial confinement.

The Creed of Ahl al-Sunnah Regarding Divine Transcendence

This orthodox Sunni creed was beautifully summarised by Imam Abu Ja'far al-Tahawi (d. 321 AH) in *al-'Aqīdah al-Tahāwīyyah*:

“He is beyond having limits placed on Him, or being restricted, or having parts or limbs. Nor is He contained by the six directions as all created things are.”

The righteous predecessors (al-Salaf) affirmed the revealed texts while purifying the mind of all bodily imagination, physical measurement, and spatial limitation. They recognised that the perfection of Allah lies in His absolute transcendence above the finite realities governing creation.

Shaykh al-Islam Muhammad Zahid al-Kawthari رحمه الله likewise strongly emphasised that attributing boundaries, dimensions, or spatial confinement to Allah reduces the Creator to the properties of created matter and contradicts the clear principles of Divine transcendence established throughout the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Ultimately, the orthodox creed of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* affirms that Allah exists without limitation, boundary, confinement, or direction. He is eternally exalted above the constraints of space, time, dimension, and physical form.

In the final analysis, the insistence on assigning boundaries (*al-Hadd*) to the Creator stems from an inability to separate the reality of existence from the mechanics of materiality. To argue that an entity must have physical limits to exist is to mistakenly treat the Creator as a grander version of His creation. In classical Sunni metaphysics, boundaries are not a sign of perfection; they are a sign of confinement, dependency, and weakness. A bounded entity is a shaped entity, and a shaped entity requires a shaper (*mukhassīs*) to dictate its measurements. By declaring that Allah is free from limits, orthodox theology does not negate His existence; rather, it rescues the intellect from the trap of reducing the Infinite to a measurable object that can be weighed, mapped, or contained.

Consequently, the pure creed of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* remains an impenetrable fortress against both literalism and anthropomorphism. The believer recognizes that the six directions are merely walls built by the Creator to house the physical universe. Allah Most High does not reside inside those walls, nor is He bounded by them. He is completely free from the constraints of size, scale, and spatial division. He stands eternally exalted above all definitions of finitude—Existing without a boundary, ruling without a limit, and sustaining the entire cosmos while remaining entirely transcendent above the dimensions of space and matter.

CHAPTER SEVEN: EXALTATION ABOVE COSMIC CONTAINMENT AND INDWELLING (AL-TANZĪH ‘AN AL-HULŪL WAL-IḤTIWĀ’)

A foundational principle of orthodox Sunni theology is that Allah Most High is the Creator of the heavens, the earth, the Throne (al-‘Arsh), space, time, and all contingent existence. It is therefore both rationally and scripturally impossible for His Divine Essence (Dhāt) to be physically contained within creation, confined by its dimensions, or dependent upon its structure.

The creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama‘ah affirms that Allah existed eternally in pre-eternity (al-Azal) without place (makān) or direction (jihah). Consequently, the creation of the universe did not introduce a new spatial relationship, nor did it cause Him to become localised within creation.

The Difference Between the Eternal Creator and Contingent Creation

Everything within creation is characterised by origination, dependence, and eventual destruction. Allah Most High alone is eternal, absolute, and everlasting. Allah says:

**“Everyone upon it shall perish, and there shall remain the Essence
of your Lord, Owner of Majesty and Honour.”**
(*Al-Raḥmān*, 55:26–27)

This verse establishes a clear distinction between the temporary nature of creation and the eternal reality of Allah Most High. Everything besides Allah came into existence after non-existence, depends entirely upon Him for its preservation, and remains subject to destruction.

If Allah were physically contained within creation, then His existence would become tied to the dimensions and limitations of created things. Such a belief is impossible, for the Eternal Creator cannot be confined within a temporary and originated container.

For this reason, Imam Abu Hanifah (d. 150 AH) stated:

“Allah existed eternally and there was no place. He existed before creating creation.”

This concise statement forms one of the foundational principles of Sunni theology. Since Allah existed before the existence of space, it follows necessarily that He remains entirely unconfined by space after creating it.

The Maturidi Refutation of Spatial Containment (Iḥṭiwā')

Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d. 333 AH) explains in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* that physical containment (iḥṭiwā') and indwelling (ḥulūl) are qualities associated exclusively with bodies and material entities.

A thing can only exist inside another thing if it possesses dimensions, boundaries, and spatial form corresponding to the container encompassing it. Bodies require location because they possess size, orientation, and measurable limits.

Allah Most High, however, is absolutely transcendent above bodily composition, dimensionality, and spatial restriction. By adhering to the governing Qur'anic principle:

“There is absolutely nothing whatsoever like unto Him.”
(*Al-Shūrā*, 42:11)

the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah refuted both crude anthropomorphism (tajsīm) and pantheistic notions of divine indwelling (ḥulūl).

To imagine Allah physically residing within the heavens or enclosed above the universe in a bodily sense is to measure the Creator according to the limitations of created matter.

The heavens and the Throne themselves are contingent creations dependent upon Allah for their existence and preservation. Allah says:

“Indeed, Allah holds the heavens and the earth lest they cease.”
(Fāṭir, 35:41)

The entire universe is sustained by the power of Allah, while He Himself requires no support, enclosure, or container. It is therefore impossible for creation to physically contain its own Creator and Sustainer.

Transcending Spatial Imagination

Physical containment necessarily implies limitation, confinement, dimensionality, and dependence. These qualities belong exclusively to originated things.

Imam Abu Jaʿfar al-Tahawi (d. 321 AH) beautifully summarised the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah in *al-ʿAqīdah al-Taḥāwīyyah*:

“He is beyond having limits placed on Him, or being restricted, or having parts or limbs. Nor is He contained by the six directions as all created things are.”

Human beings naturally struggle to conceptualise existence beyond physical limitation because the mind operates through sensory experience and material imagination. However, as Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH) explained, the imagination is merely a faculty designed to process created realities and is incapable of comprehending the Divine Essence.

Shaykh al-Islam Muhammad Zahid al-Kawthari رحمه الله likewise strongly opposed attributing spatial indwelling, bodily occupation, or cosmic containment to Allah, repeatedly affirming that such notions fundamentally contradict the transcendence established by the Qurʿan, the Sunnah, and the consensus of Sunni orthodoxy.

The Orthodox Understanding of Divine Transcendence

When orthodox Muslims affirm the existence of Allah, they do not imagine Him as an entity physically residing inside the universe, occupying a location within creation, or confined within direction and space.

Rather, they affirm His existence in a manner befitting His Divine Majesty — entirely distinct from the physical realities governing creation.

He is the transcendent Lord of the cosmos, unconfined by place, untouched by containment, and eternally self-sufficient.

Fundamentally, the error of attributing cosmic containment to the Divine Essence lies in a failure to grasp the absolute distinction between the Maker and the made. To imagine that the Creator requires a celestial envelope to house His existence is to inadvertently subordinate the Infinite to the finite. In the framework of classical Sunni metaphysics, a container is always greater than its contents in its ability to restrict, boundary, and define. By establishing that the entire universe is merely a sustained artifact of Divine will, orthodox theology proves that the cosmos can no more contain its Creator than a painting can enclose the artist.

As a necessary consequence, the orthodox believer views the universe not as a dwelling place for the Divine, but as a vast testimony to His boundless authority. The boundaries of space, the heights of the heavens, and the expanse of the Throne are dimensions designed exclusively to govern the creature, not the Creator. Allah Most High remains entirely untouched by the mechanics of enclosure and location. He exists now as He has always existed in pre-eternity — unconfined by the cosmos, untethered to spatial dimensions, and infinitely exalted above any form of material containment or indwelling.

Ultimately, the doctrine that Allah exists without a place is not merely an exercise in abstract metaphysics, but the very safeguard of pure monotheism (*tawhīd*). By declaring that the Divine Essence transcends cosmic containment (*iḥtiwāʿ*) and material indwelling (*ḥulūl*), orthodox Sunni theology liberates the human intellect from the shackles of anthropomorphic imagination. It

forces the believer to move beyond the worship of a localized, finite deity restricted by the fabric of His own creation. To affirm that Allah Most High exists free from spatial confinement is to truly recognize His Absolute Self-Sufficiency (*al-Ghinā al-Mutlaq*) and Boundless Majesty. He brought forth space and time out of non-existence, yet remains eternally independent of both. He exists now exactly as He existed in pre-eternity—unconfined by the cosmos, untethered to spatial dimensions, and infinitely exalted above any form of material containment, location, or boundary.

CHAPTER EIGHT: DIVINE GRANDEUR AND EXALTATION ABOVE PHYSICAL MAGNITUDE (AL-KIBRIYĀ' WAL-'ULUWW AL-MA'NAWĪ)

A foundational principle of orthodox Sunni theology is that Allah Most High is the absolute Creator of all things and entirely independent of His creation. Nothing within the universe can contain Him, encompass Him, surround Him, or surpass Him in greatness. He is the Supreme, the Majestic, and the Absolute, while all creation remains utterly dependent upon Him.

One of the central errors of anthropomorphic thinking (*tashbīh*) is the assumption that divine greatness must correspond to physical size, spatial extension, or geometric scale. Some imagine that for Allah to be “greater” than creation, He must physically occupy a larger space above or around the cosmos.

In reality, whatever occupies space is itself confined by space. Any entity existing within dimensions is necessarily measured, limited, and defined by those dimensions. Such qualities belong exclusively to created things.

Divine Greatness Is Not Physical Magnitude

The Throne, the heavens, and the entire physical universe are all created realities brought into existence by Allah Most High. They possess dimensions, boundaries, and measurable scale. Allah, however, is pre-eternal and entirely transcendent above the limitations governing physical creation.

For this reason, scriptural descriptions of divine greatness must be understood through the lens of transcendence (*tanzīh*), not crude literalism. Allah says:

“His Kursī extends over the heavens and the earth.”

(Al-Baqarah, 2:255)

And He says:

“They have not appraised Allah with true appraisal, while the entire earth will be within His grasp on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens will be folded in His right hand.”

(Al-Zumar, 39:67)

The scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah understood these verses as expressions of Allah’s absolute dominion, authority, power, and majesty over creation. They did not interpret them according to bodily limbs, physical hands, or spatial dimensions.

To interpret such texts literally in a corporeal sense would reduce the Creator to the characteristics of physical matter and subject Him to measurement, dimension, and orientation.

Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d. 333 AH) explains in *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* that the greatness of Allah is entirely unlike physical largeness or material scale. Concepts such as size, quantity, and volume apply only to created bodies.

Because Allah is the Creator of distance, scale, dimension, and spatial measurement, His Divine Essence transcends all such categories. If Allah were physically “larger” than the universe in a bodily sense, He would still be subject to measurement and dimensionality — both of which are qualities of created things.

The Difference Between Majesty and Physical Scale

The Throne itself, despite being the greatest creation described in revelation, remains entirely dependent upon Allah. It possesses no power to sustain, contain, or encompass its Creator. Rather, the Throne itself exists only through the sustaining power of Allah Most High.

When some literalists imagine divine greatness through physical elevation or spatial largeness, they unknowingly compare Allah to created things and measure Him according to the standards of material existence.

Imam Abu Ja'far al-Tahawi (d. 321 AH) beautifully summarised the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah:

“He is beyond having limits placed on Him, or being restricted, or having parts or limbs. Nor is He contained by the six directions as all created things are.”

The scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah therefore rejected all attempts to reduce Allah's greatness to physical measurements, bodily dimensions, or spatial magnitude.

Transcending Material Imagination

Human beings naturally think through physical comparison because the mind is shaped by sensory experience. Every created thing encountered in the material world possesses size, location, and measurable scale.

However, as Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH) explained, the imagination is merely a faculty designed to process created realities and is incapable of comprehending the Divine Essence.

Likewise, Shaykh al-Islam Muhammad Zahid al-Kawthari رحمه الله strongly opposed interpreting divine greatness through bodily size, spatial occupation, or physical extension, emphasising that such notions contradict the transcendence affirmed throughout the Qur'an and the creed of the early Muslims.

The righteous predecessors (al-Salaf al-Sālih) affirmed Allah's supreme greatness while negating from Him all bodily form, spatial limitation, and physical magnitude.

Thus, when Muslims proclaim:

“Allāhu Akbar”

they do not mean that Allah is physically larger than creation in terms of size or volume. Rather, they affirm that Allah is greater in majesty, dominion,

perfection, power, and transcendence than everything within the created order.

He remains exactly as He eternally was before the creation of the universe — Absolute, Majestic, and infinitely exalted above the limitations of the physical cosmos.

By extension, the trap of corporealism lies in its inability to conceive of majesty outside the metrics of the tape measure and the compass. To suggest that the Creator is "greater" than the cosmos merely by virtue of physical displacement or cosmic volume is to reduce the Divine Essence to a grander form of created architecture. In the light of classical Sunni metaphysics, physical size is not a Divine attribute; it is an accident of matter that demands a creator to specify its length, breadth, and height. By purifying the understanding of *Allāhu Akbar*, orthodox theology elevates the mind from the crude calculations of material scale, anchoring the believer's awe in a Creator whose supremacy is measured in absolute power, eternal self-sufficiency, and boundless dominion.

It logically follows that the exaltation of the Creator (*Al-'Uluww*) must be understood as an elevation of rank and majesty, completely untethered to physical coordinates or spatial heights. The heavens and the celestial Throne are markers of cosmic distance, built to evoke humility within the creation, not to serve as a physical ceiling for the Divine Essence. Allah Most High remains entirely transcendent above the concepts of size, volume, and physical extension. He exists now exactly as He was before the creation of the cosmos—unbound by the metrics of physical magnitude, unparalleled in His supreme majesty, and infinitely exalted above the very dimensions of space and scale. Thus, the sound intellect must rest upon the ultimate, foundational axiom of true monotheism: **Allah exists without a place.**

CHAPTER NINE: THE CRITERION OF VIRTUE AND THE SUPERIORITY OF THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD ﷺ OVER THE CELESTIAL THRONE (AFDĀLIYYAT AL-NABĪ 'ALĀ AL-'ARSH)

A misconception that occasionally appears in theological discussions is the assumption that because the celestial Throne (al-'Arsh) is the greatest creation in physical size, it must therefore possess the highest rank and virtue before Allah Most High. This assumption is fundamentally flawed. While the Throne is indeed immense in scale and grandeur, orthodox Islamic theology does not equate physical magnitude with spiritual superiority or divine preference.

The consensus (ijmā') of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah affirms that the most honoured and exalted of all creation is our master Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. His superiority is established throughout revelation. Allah Most High says:

“And We have not sent you except as a mercy to all the worlds.”
(*Al-Anbiyā'*, 21:107)

And He says:

“And indeed, you are upon an immense character.”
(*Al-Qalam*, 68:4)

As the Seal of the Prophets (Khātām al-Anbiyā'), the leader of the Messengers, and the Beloved of Allah (Ḥabībullāh), the Messenger of Allah ﷺ possesses a rank above the entirety of creation. His superiority extends over the heavens, the earth, the angels, and the Throne itself.

Spiritual Rank Is Not Determined by Physical Size

The scholars of Islam consistently affirmed this reality. Qadi Iyad (d. 544 AH) explains in *al-Shifā bi-Ta'rīf Ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā* that the Muslim community is

united upon the supreme rank and excellence of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ over all created things.

Building upon this principle, many classical scholars affirmed that the blessed earth containing the noble body of the Prophet ﷺ in Madinah possesses a greater sanctity and virtue than every other place in existence — including the Ka'bah and even the celestial Throne — because of the incomparable honour of the one resting within it.

This establishes an important theological principle: physical greatness does not determine spiritual virtue. The heavens are vastly larger than the earth, yet Allah honoured the children of Adam above much of creation:

“And We have certainly honoured the children of Adam.”
(Al-Isrā', 17:70)

Likewise, the superiority of the Prophet ﷺ is not based upon physical magnitude, but upon divine selection, perfect servitude, supreme character, and unparalleled spiritual rank.

Refuting Anthropomorphic Interpretations of the Throne

This discussion carries particular importance because some literalist groups attempt to justify anthropomorphic beliefs by emphasising the immense size of the Throne. They imagine that because the Throne is the greatest created structure, Allah must physically sit upon it to demonstrate supremacy.

The Hanafi-Maturidi methodology firmly rejects this assumption. The Throne remains a created and dependent object. It came into existence after non-existence and remains entirely sustained by the power of Allah. Allah existed eternally before the creation of the Throne, and His absolute self-sufficiency was never dependent upon it.

Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d. 333 AH) explains in *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān* that references to the Throne signify divine authority, dominion, and governance over creation — not physical residence or bodily occupation.

By understanding the Throne as a sign of divine majesty rather than a container for the Divine Essence, the believer avoids the errors of corporealism and preserves the transcendence of Allah Most High.

The Unique Rank of the Prophet ﷺ

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ was granted honours unmatched by any other created being. He alone was given:

- the Station of Praise (al-Maqām al-Mahmūd),
- the greatest intercession (al-Shafā'ah al-Kubrā),
- and the highest rank among all creation.

For this reason, the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah universally described him as:

Khayr al-Khalq — the Best of Creation.

Shaykh al-Islam Muhammad Zahid al-Kawthari رحمه الله likewise emphasised that the greatness of the Throne does not imply any form of bodily occupation or spatial dependence for Allah. Rather, the Throne itself is among the countless signs pointing toward the absolute majesty, authority, and transcendence of its Creator.

Ultimately, while the Throne is the greatest creation in physical magnitude, the highest and most honoured of all creation is, without exception, our master Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. May the most perfect peace, blessings, and honour forever abide upon him, his noble family, and his righteous companions.

Ultimately, this profound hierarchy of creation shatters the foundational illusions of anthropomorphism. By establishing that the spiritual reality of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ vastly outshines the physical immensity of the celestial Throne, orthodox Sunni theology forces the intellect to look beyond the crude metrics of mass, direction, and spatial dimension. The Throne is the ceiling of the cosmos—a grand, physical boundary marker for created things—yet the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was elevated beyond it during the Night Ascension (*al-Mi'rāj*), not to achieve physical proximity to a localized Creator,

but to demonstrate that true divine closeness is measured in perfect servitude, not spatial distance.

Therefore, to reduce the transcendent Essence of Allah to a physical occupant of the Throne is to fundamentally misunderstand both the Creator and His most exalted creation. It attempts to confine the Infinite within a finite, dependent structure, while ignoring that the spiritual station of a single servant, *Khayr al-Khalq*, already surpasses that very structure in the sight of the Almighty. The sound intellect must conclude that Allah Most High remains absolutely free from space, boundaries, and direction, ruling over the universe with supreme authority, while the celestial Throne stands not as a physical seat for the Divine, but as a silent monument to the absolute transcendence of the Creator and the unmatched supremacy of His Beloved

ﷺ.

CHAPTER TEN: EXALTATION ABOVE DIRECTIONAL ORIENTATION AND CELESTIAL LOCALISATION (AL-TANZĪH ‘AN AL-JIHAH WAL-FAWQIYYAH AL-JISMĀNIYYAH)

Among the most widespread theological misconceptions is the claim that Allah Most High is physically located within the heavens or situated above the universe in a literal spatial sense. While revelation contains expressions of elevation and exaltedness, the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama‘ah — upheld by Imam Abu Hanifah, Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi, and Imam Abu al-Hasan al-Ash‘ari — affirms that Allah exists entirely beyond place, direction, and spatial confinement.

Because Allah is the Creator of the heavens, elevation, and space itself, it is impossible for His Divine Essence to be contained within the dimensions of creation.

Understanding the Hadith of the Slave Girl (Ḥadīth al-Jāriyah)

Some literalist groups heavily rely upon the famous narration of the slave girl to argue that Allah exists in a physical direction. In the narration, the Prophet ﷺ asked a young slave girl:

“Where is Allah?” (Ayna Allah?)

She replied:

“In the heaven” (Fī al-Samā’).

The Prophet ﷺ then said:

“Free her, for she is a believer.”

The scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah explained that the Prophet ﷺ was not conducting a technical theological inquiry regarding the spatial location of the Divine Essence. Rather, he was testing her affirmation of tawḥīd in a society dominated by idol worship and paganism.

The pagans worshipped earthly idols made from stone and wood. By saying “In the heaven,” the slave girl was affirming the transcendence, supremacy, and exaltedness of Allah above the false gods worshipped on earth.

In classical Arabic usage, expressions of elevation and height frequently signify greatness, authority, and majesty rather than physical location. Even in ordinary speech, people describe rulers or leaders as being “above” others, intending superiority of rank rather than bodily altitude.

The scholars therefore understood this narration according to the broader principles of Divine transcendence established throughout the Qur’an and Sunnah.

Textual Variance and Critical Analysis of the Narration (Al-Idṭirāb fī al-Lafz)

A common pitfall in contemporary theological debate is the isolated reliance on a single narration without cross-referencing its parallel transmissions. Factions seeking to assign a physical location to the Creator frequently cite the famous dialogue of the slave girl in **Sahih Muslim (Book of Prayer, Hadith 537)** as an absolute mandate. However, classical hadith masters recognised that this specific text suffers from significant textual variance (*idṭirāb fī al-lafz*). When the multiple chains of this historical event are collated, the claim that the question “Where is Allah?” was a mandatory standard for faith completely dissolves.

The Variant Recensions of the Prophetic Dialogue

While the report transmitted by Mu’awiyah ibn al-Hakam al-Sulami in **Sahih Muslim (Hadith 537)** utilises the spatial question “Where is Allah?”, several variant narrations record the event with entirely different, non-spatial wording:

- **The Recension of Imam Ahmad:** In the *Musnad* of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (Vol. 3, Hadith 11145), the Prophet ﷺ does not inquire about location. Instead, the text states that he asked her, “Who is your Lord?” (*Man*

Rabbuki?), to which she replied, "**Allah.**" He then asked, "**Who am I?**", and she replied, "**You are the Messenger of Allah.**".

- **The Recension of Imam al-Nasa'i:** In the *Sunan* of Imam al-Nasa'i (Book of Wills, Hadith 3653), the inquiry is recorded purely as a validation of monotheism. The Prophet ﷺ asked her, "Who is your Lord?", and upon her replying "Allah", he commanded her release, stating, "Free her, for she is a believer."
- **The Recension of Imam al-Darimi:** Parallel to al-Nasa'i, the *Sunan* of al-Darimi (Hadith 2341) preserves the dialogue strictly as a test of the *Shahada*, omitting any linguistic variation of the word *ayna* ("where").

The Methodological Verdict of the Masters

Hadith masters such as Imam al-Bayhaqi in *Al-Asma' was-Sifat* highlighted these stark contradictions to prove that the narrators reported the event by its generalized meaning (*al-riwāyah bil-ma'nā*) rather than the exact, verbatim syllables spoken by the Prophet ﷺ. In Sunni jurisprudence, a solitary text (*khābar al-wāḥid*) that exhibits such internal variance cannot be used to establish fundamental creedal dogmas—especially when it stands in apparent contradiction to the definitive, unambiguous (*muḥkam*) verses of the Qur'an.

By extension, treating a textually unstable narration as the definitive foundation for the Divine Essence exposes the deep methodological flaws of literalist hermeneutics. To elevate the word "where" to a foundational pillar of creed while ignoring parallel transmissions that focus entirely on the *Shahada* is an act of selective proof-texting. The classical Sunni tradition safely navigates these textual variations by subordinating the ambiguous text to the absolute certainty of revelation. It logically follows that a fluid, historical dialogue cannot be used to construct boundaries for the Infinite; thus, **Allah exists without a place.**

The Symbolism of the Gesture and Refutation of Corporeal Pointing (Al-Ishārah wal-Tawhīd)

In certain transmissions of this encounter, most notably recorded in **Sunan Abi Dawud (Book of Oaths and Vows, Hadith 3284)**, the text states that the slave girl did not speak, but rather "**pointed to the heaven with her finger**" (*fa-ashārat ilā al-samā'i bi-isba'ihā*). Literalist commentators seize upon this variant to argue for a physical direction (*jihā*), claiming she pointed to the sky because that is where the Divine Essence literally resides. This crude physical interpretation completely misses the profound symbolic vocabulary of the Prophetic era.

The Finger as the Universal Sign of Tawhid

In the linguistic and cultural framework of the Sahabah, raising the index finger was never an exercise in physical mapping. Rather, it was the universal bodily sign of *Tawhid*—the declaration of the absolute oneness of God. This is perfectly mirrored in the daily ritual prayer:

- **The Tashahhud:** During the sitting portion of every prayer, the believer raises the index finger precisely when uttering the words of monotheism.
- **The Prophetic Precedent:** The Prophet ﷺ famously raised his index finger toward the sky and pointed it at the crowd during his Farewell Sermon recorded in **Sahih Muslim (Book of Hajj, Hadith 1218)**. He was not pointing to indicate God's physical bedroom; he was using a grand, symbolic gesture of testification.

The Rejection of Localised Deities

When the young slave girl—who was mute or linguistically limited in certain accounts—pointed upward, she was communicating using the established spiritual shorthand of her time. Earthly idols were local, bound to stone, and housed in physical sanctuaries on the ground. By gesturing away from the earth toward the expansive heavens, her finger signaled a complete rejection of pagan immanence. Her gesture meant: "*My Lord is not among these terrestrial stone idols; He is the High, the Transcendent, the One.*" To degrade this

pure declaration of *Tawhid* into a physical compass point is a grave error of material imagination.

In the final analysis, reducing the slave girl's symbolic gesture to a literal map coordinate reveals a profound inability to transcend physical imagination. The raising of the finger was an act of theological renunciation, a silent *Shahada* that mirrored the very movement of the *tashahhud* performed by millions of believers daily. The heavens are the *qiblah* of supplication and the ultimate symbol of cosmic loftiness, making them the natural target for a gesture of supreme veneration. The sound intellect must look past the physical trajectory of the hand and recognize the spiritual reality of the heart, remaining firmly anchored in the timeless truth that **Allah exists without a place.**

Raising the Hands in Supplication

Another common misunderstanding arises from the practice of raising the hands toward the heavens during supplication (du'ā'). Some mistakenly argue that this proves Allah is physically located above the sky.

The scholars clarified that the heavens function as the symbolic direction of supplication (qiblat al-du'ā'), just as the Ka'bah functions as the direction of prayer (qiblat al-ṣalāh).

No Muslim believes that Allah physically resides inside the Ka'bah. Rather, it serves as a sacred direction for worship. Likewise, the heavens symbolise exaltedness, revelation, mercy, and divine authority.

If merely facing a direction proved physical localisation, then the act of prostration (sujūd) would imply that Allah is physically beneath the earth, since the believer places his forehead upon the ground while being closest to his Lord during sujūd. Such reasoning is clearly invalid.

Divine Nearness and Encompassing Knowledge

The scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah also balanced the verses of exaltedness with verses affirming Allah's nearness and encompassing knowledge. Allah says:

"And He is with you wherever you are."

(Al-Ḥadīd, 57:4)

And He says:

"And We are closer to him than his jugular vein."

(Qāf, 50:16)

The scholars never interpreted these verses as physical indwelling (ḥulūl), just as they did not interpret the verses of elevation as bodily localisation.

Rather, these texts refer to Allah's complete knowledge, power, authority, and awareness encompassing all things. Allah is entirely transcendent above spatial boundaries, while His knowledge and power extend over every part of creation.

Imam Abu Ja'far al-Tahawi (d. 321 AH) beautifully summarised the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah:

"He is beyond having limits placed on Him, or being restricted, or having parts or limbs. Nor is He contained by the six directions as all created things are."

The righteous predecessors (al-Salaf) affirmed the revealed texts while negating all bodily resemblance, physical direction, and spatial confinement from Allah Most High.

The Meaning of Divine Exaltedness (al-'Uluww)

Accordingly, the exaltedness of Allah (al-'Uluww) is understood by Ahl al-Sunnah as an exaltedness of majesty, authority, dominion, perfection, and power — not bodily altitude or physical elevation.

Shaykh al-Islam Muhammad Zahid al-Kawthari رحمه الله strongly emphasised that interpreting divine exaltedness through physical direction or bodily localisation inevitably leads to corporealism and contradicts the clear principles of transcendence upheld by the early Muslims and the scholars of Sunni orthodoxy.

Allah existed eternally before the creation of the heavens, space, and direction, and He remains exactly as He eternally was — Absolute, Supreme, and entirely unconfined by place or direction.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE MUTUAL EXCLUSIVITY OF THE CREATOR AND THE COSMOS (AL- TANZĪH ‘AN AL-ITTIHĀD WAL-HULŪL)

A foundational principle of orthodox Sunni theology is the absolute distinction between the Creator and creation. Allah Most High is eternal, absolute, and entirely self-sufficient, whereas the universe is originated, dependent, and contingent upon Him for its continued existence.

Just as Allah cannot be physically contained within creation, it is equally impossible for creation to be physically contained within the Divine Essence. The Creator does not merge with creation, indwell within it, or physically encompass the universe in the manner of a surrounding container. Such notions reduce the Divine Majesty to the characteristics of material bodies and fundamentally violate the principles of tawhīd.

The Falsehood of Pantheistic Containment

The governing Qur’anic principle in this discussion remains the definitive statement of Allah Most High:

“There is absolutely nothing whatsoever like unto Him.”
(Al-Shūrā, 42:11)

This verse negates every attempt to impose the mechanics of created matter upon the Divine Essence. Within the physical world, containment and enclosure occur only between bodies and material entities. A thing either contains another thing or is itself contained. Such relationships belong exclusively to physical existence.

Allah Most High, however, is the Creator of space, dimensions, direction, bodies, and all material realities. It is therefore impossible for Him to be governed by the physical laws of His own creation.

For this reason, Imam Abu Hanifah (d. 150 AH) affirmed:

“Allah existed eternally and there was no place.”

By establishing that Allah existed before the creation of space, the Hanafi-Maturidi school affirms that the creation of the universe did not produce any form of physical union, spatial merging, or bodily connection between the Creator and creation.

The scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah described Allah as:

Bā'in min khalqihī — distinct from His creation.

This distinction refers to the complete difference between the Creator and creation in essence and reality, not physical distance, spatial separation, or directional location.

Refuting Incarnationism and Pantheistic Union

Throughout Islamic history, certain fringe sects fell into the errors of incarnationism (*ḥulūl*) and pantheistic union (*ittihād*). Some claimed that creation is an extension of the Divine Essence, while others imagined the cosmos existing inside Allah in a literal sense.

Such beliefs directly contradict revelation. Allah Most High says:

“Allah is the Creator of all things.”

(*Al-Zumar*, 39:62)

By definition, the Creator must be distinct from His creation. If creation were physically inside Allah, this would imply that the Divine Essence contains originated, changing, and decaying entities within itself. Such a belief contradicts the absolute perfection, immutability, and transcendence of Allah Most High.

Containment is a relationship that exists only between material things. Water contains fish, buildings contain people, and the atmosphere surrounds the earth. These relationships require shared space, dimensions, boundaries, and physical contact.

Because Allah is not a body, substance, or material entity, creation cannot exist “inside” Him in any literal or physical sense.

Understanding Divine Nearness

The scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah carefully explained verses describing divine nearness and presence in a manner consistent with transcendence. Allah says:

“And We are closer to him than his jugular vein.”

(Qāf, 50:16)

And He says:

“And He is with you wherever you are.”

(Al-Hādīd, 57:4)

The scholars never interpreted these verses as bodily indwelling or physical proximity. Rather, they understood them as referring to Allah’s complete knowledge, absolute power, encompassing awareness, and total authority over creation.

Allah is near to His creation through His knowledge, mercy, power, and dominion, while remaining entirely transcendent above physical contact, indwelling, and spatial confinement.

Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi explains in *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* that interpreting such verses literally in a bodily sense inevitably leads either to corporealism or pantheism — both of which contradict the clear teachings of the Qur’an and the consensus of Ahl al-Sunnah.

Likewise, Shaykh al-Islam Muhammad Zahid al-Kawthari رحمه الله strongly opposed all forms of incarnationism, bodily indwelling, and pantheistic interpretation, repeatedly affirming the complete distinction between the Eternal Creator and contingent creation.

1. If both opposite directions supposedly indicate the same physical location of Allah, then one would have to imagine Allah physically surrounding or enclosing the universe.
2. This resembles the mechanics of a person submerged underwater: no matter which direction they point, they are still pointing toward the water surrounding them.

However, Allah Most High is not a material substance, physical container, or spatial enclosure. To imagine the universe existing inside Allah, or Allah physically surrounding creation in a bodily sense, collapses into forms of corporealism or pantheistic enclosure — both of which contradict the pure creed of tawhīd.

This rational demonstration therefore exposes the impossibility of assigning a literal spatial direction to Allah. Either the model collapses into contradiction, or it reduces the Divine Essence to the properties of material bodies.

The Absolute Distinction Between Creator and Creation

For this reason, Imam Abu Ja'far al-Tahawi (d. 321 AH) affirmed:

“He is beyond having limits placed on Him, or being restricted, or having parts or limbs. Nor is He contained by the six directions as all created things are.”

The righteous predecessors (al-Salaf) affirmed the revealed texts while preserving the absolute transcendence of Allah Most High. They neither reduced Allah to the characteristics of created matter nor dissolved the distinction between the Creator and creation.

Allah is not inside the universe, nor is the universe inside Him. He is entirely distinct from creation while remaining fully aware of, powerful over, and sustaining every created thing.

He existed eternally before the existence of the cosmos and remains exactly as He eternally was — Absolute, Self-Sufficient, and utterly transcendent above the limitations of creation.

In the final analysis, the absolute mutual exclusivity between the Creator and the cosmos is the ultimate bulwark protecting the purity of *tawhīd*. To compromise on this distinction by mixing the Divine Essence with the material universe—whether through literal spatial containment or pantheistic union (*ittihād*)—is to introduce decay into the Divine and divinity into the decaying. The Hanafi-Maturidi tradition decisively severs this error. By establishing that Allah is fundamentally distinct from His creation (*bā'in min khalqihī*), orthodox metaphysics preserves both the unassailable perfection of the Lord and the true reality of the universe. The cosmos remains a dependent, originated mirror of Divine power, while Allah Most High remains completely untarnished by the mechanics of time, space, and physical relation. He existed eternally before the cosmos, independent of its boundaries, and He remains now exactly as He has always been—the Sovereign, Self-Sufficient Creator, intimately close to His creation through His infinite knowledge and power, yet forever exalted in His transcendent Essence above the limitations of the universe.

CHAPTER TWELVE: DECONSTRUCTING SPATIAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE DIVINE ASCENSION (AL-TANZĪH ‘AN AL-FAWQIYYAH AL-MAKĀNIYYAH)

Among the most misunderstood subjects in Islamic theology are the scriptural texts concerning the celestial Throne (al-‘Arsh) and Allah’s istiwā over it. Certain literalist and anthropomorphic groups interpret these texts through a physical and spatial lens, claiming that Allah is literally situated above the Throne in the manner of a ruler occupying a seat.

Such interpretations fundamentally contradict the principles of tawhīd and Divine transcendence. Allah Most High existed eternally before the creation of the Throne, the heavens, space, direction, or any physical dimension. It is therefore impossible for His Divine Essence to become dependent upon, confined by, or spatially related to a created object.

The Nature of Istiwā in Sunni Theology

The primary verse in this discussion is the statement of Allah Most High:
“The Most Merciful made istiwā over the Throne.”
(Tā Hā, 20:5)

In the Hanafi-Maturidi tradition, this verse is recognised as belonging to the ambiguous scriptural expressions (al-āyāt al-mutashābihāt) whose ultimate reality cannot be comprehended by the finite human intellect.

The righteous predecessors (al-Salaf al-Sālih) approached such verses with reverence, humility, and strict adherence to the governing Qur’anic principle of transcendence:

“There is absolutely nothing whatsoever like unto Him.”
(Al-Shūrā, 42:11)

Accordingly, they affirmed the revealed wording while negating from Allah all bodily qualities, spatial confinement, physical direction, and material modality.

This methodology was beautifully summarised by Malik ibn Anas (d. 179 AH), who famously stated regarding *istiwa*:

“*Istiwā* is known, its ‘how’ (*kayf*) is inconceivable, belief in it is obligatory, and asking about it is an innovation.”

The scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah clarified that Imam Mālik was not concealing a physical modality unknown to creation. Rather, he was affirming that bodily modality itself is impossible to attribute to Allah Most High.

The Linguistic Meaning of *Istiwā*

In classical Arabic usage, the word *istiwa* possesses multiple meanings beyond physical sitting or bodily settlement. These include:

- dominion and authority (*istīlā'*),
- completion and perfection,
- and the manifestation of sovereign control.

For this reason, the scholars never restricted the verse to a corporeal interpretation.

Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d. 333 AH) explains in *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān* that the Throne is mentioned because it represents the greatest and loftiest creation known to humanity. By associating *istiwa* with the Throne, revelation emphasises Allah's complete authority, dominion, and governance over the entire cosmos.

The verse therefore points toward divine majesty and absolute sovereignty — not bodily sitting, spatial occupation, or physical elevation.

The Theological Significance of Al-Rahmān in the Verse of *Istiwā*

A critical aspect of the Hanafi-Maturidi hermeneutical method is to analyze not just the verbs of revelation, but the specific Divine Names coupled with them. In the foundational verse of this discussion, Allah Most High states:

**“The Most Merciful (Al-Rahmān) made istiwā over the Throne.”
(Tā Hā, 20:5)**

A profound question arises for the objective researcher: Why did Allah choose the specific Name Al-Rahmān in this precise context? If istiwā were intended to convey a literal, physical subjugation of a territory, or the corporeal sitting of a monarch upon a physical seat, the text would logically demand a Name associated with raw force, dominion, or structural power — such as Al-Malik (The Sovereign), Al-Qahhār (The Subduer), or Al-Jabbār (The Compeller).

The deliberate usage of Al-Rahmān serves as an immediate, scriptural refutation of anthropomorphism. Mercy is not a spatial quality, nor can it be localized within geometric dimensions. By anchoring the reality of istiwā to absolute mercy, revelation signals that this relationship is metaphysical and spiritual, completely removed from the crude constraints of physical matter. To suggest that Allah is physically settling or establishing His bodily essence upon a created structure is to ignore the very nature of the Name He chose to unveil. Such physical concepts are utterly beneath the majesty of the Divine Essence.

The Throne as the Seat of Universal Judgment and Mercy

Building upon this linguistic reality, many classical commentators and spiritual masters provided a deeply reassuring interpretation of this verse, linking it directly to the eschatological reality of the Day of Judgment. The celestial Throne (al-‘Arsh) is frequently described in the Qur'an as the locus of

ultimate accountability, where all of creation will be gathered, questioned, and judged.

By declaring that Al-Rahmān is the one who makes *istiwa* over the Throne, the verse provides a monumental promise to the believer regarding the final accounting:

- **The Enveloping of Wrath:** It indicates that on the Day of Resurrection, when humanity stands in absolute vulnerability before the majestic Throne, they will look up to find a Lord whose defining attribute over that supreme station is all-encompassing mercy.
- **The Overpowering Promise:** This beautifully mirrors the famous divine declaration recorded in Sahih Bukhari (Book of the Beginning of Creation, Hadith 3194), where the Prophet ﷺ stated that Allah wrote above His Throne: "Indeed, My mercy outstrips My wrath."

Therefore, *istiwa* signifies the absolute victory and distribution of divine grace from the highest point of the cosmos down to the lowest creation. It assures the human heart that the supreme governance of the universe is fundamentally rooted in compassion.

Consequently, the verse has absolutely nothing to do with the physical localized confinement of the Creator. It is an expression of absolute majesty and comforting reassurance, reminding the creation that their ultimate return is to a Lord whose mercy encompasses all things. By looking past the trap of literalist imagination and recognizing the spiritual reality of Al-Rahmān, the sound intellect breaks free from the chains of anthropomorphism, resting securely upon the eternal truth that Allah exists without a place.

The Logical Problems of Spatial Interpretation

If Allah were physically situated above the Throne in a literal sense, several impossible consequences would necessarily follow.

He would:

- occupy a direction,
- possess a spatial relationship with creation,
- exist at a measurable distance from the Throne,
- and become subject to dimension, boundary, and location.

Anything confined within direction or measurable space is necessarily limited and composite. Such qualities belong exclusively to created bodies.

For this reason, Imam Abu Ja'far al-Tahawi (d. 321 AH) stated:

“He is beyond having limits placed on Him, or being restricted, or having parts or limbs. Nor is He contained by the six directions as all created things are.”

The orthodox scholars therefore rejected all interpretations implying bodily elevation, spatial contact, or geometric localisation.

Reverence Instead of Material Imagination

The purpose of the *mutashābih* verses is not to encourage believers to construct a physical image of Allah in the mind. Rather, these verses cultivate awe, reverence, and recognition of Allah's supreme authority over creation.

The scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah carefully protected the revealed texts from two extremes:

- denying the Divine Attributes altogether (*ta'tīl*),
- or reducing Allah to the likeness of creation (*tashbīh*).

Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH) explained that the imagination is merely a faculty created to process finite sensory realities and is incapable of comprehending the Infinite Divine Essence.

Likewise, Shaykh al-Islam Muhammad Zahid al-Kawthari رحمه الله strongly opposed interpreting *istiwā* through bodily sitting, physical elevation, or spatial localisation, repeatedly affirming that such interpretations contradict

the transcendence upheld by the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the consensus of Sunni orthodoxy. Accordingly, orthodox Muslims affirm the verses concerning the Throne exactly as revelation presents them, while negating from Allah all bodily modality, physical confinement, and directional limitation. Allah remains entirely independent of the Throne, unconfined by space, untouched by direction, and exactly as He eternally was before the creation of the universe — Absolute, Supreme, and Perfectly Self-Sufficient.

To close this discussion, the danger of assigning spatial height to the Divine Essence lies in confusing symbolic majesty with geometric altitude. Treating the highest physical point in creation as a literal floor for the Creator mistakenly assumes that spiritual closeness operates on physical coordinates.

As we have established through the deliberate scriptural choice of the Name *Al-Rahmān*, the reality of *istiwa* is fundamentally an unveiling of universal mercy and comforting reassurance, not a physical establishing of a bodily presence. By moving the understanding of this text away from human posture, orthodox theology protects the mind from the error of treating the Lord of the universe like a created ruler who needs a physical platform to project authority.

It logically follows that the Throne stands not as a physical dwelling for the Creator, but as a grand testament to His absolute dominion over the creation. The heights of the cosmos are built to inspire awe in the hearts of creatures, not to serve as a physical ceiling for the Divine Essence. Allah Most High remains entirely untouched by the mechanics of distance, direction, and spatial placement. He exists now exactly as He was before the creation of the cosmos—unbound by the metrics of altitude, unparalleled in His supreme majesty, and infinitely exalted above the very dimensions of space and scale. The sound intellect must rest upon the ultimate, foundational axiom of true monotheism: **Allah exists without a place.**

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: DIVINE ENCOMPASSMENT AND THE MYSTERIES OF OF IMMANENCE (*AL-IḤĀTAH WAL-MA'TYYAH AL-ILĀHIYYAH*)

A foundational pillar of orthodox Sunni metaphysics is that Allah Most High is completely unconfined by place, directional fields, or corporeal parameters. Having established in previous chapters that the Divine Essence transcends physical height and spatial elevation above the Throne, it is equally critical to understand how He relates to the cosmos. He encompasses the entirety of the cosmic architecture through His pre-eternal, uncreated attributes of knowledge (*'ilm*), omnipotence (*qudrah*), sovereign authority, and total dominion.

Absolutely nothing within the visible or invisible realms can escape His divine gaze or fall outside His cosmic decree—whether situated in the highest celestial vault or the deep terrestrial strata, whether manifested outwardly or concealed within the secret recesses of the human heart. This absolute encompassment represents one of the most sublime expressions of divine perfection. However, it is frequently distorted by two opposing interpretive errors: the crude, hyper-literalism of corporealist factions, and the pantheistic indwelling (*ḥulūl*) of heretical mystics.

Deconstructing the Scriptural Proofs of Divine Presence

To establish the reality of divine immanence, the text of revelation abounds with explicit, multi-layered declarations:

“And Allah encompasses all things.”
(*Al-Nisā'*, 4:126)

“He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six days and then established His authority (*istiwā*) over the Throne. He knows what enters into the earth and what comes forth from it, and what descends from the

heaven and what ascends into it. And He is with you wherever you are.”
(Al-Ḥadīd, 57:4)

Furthermore, Allah underscores this inescapable presence by stating:

“No secret conversation takes place between three except that He is the fourth of them, nor between five except that He is the sixth of them, nor fewer nor more except that He is with them wherever they may be.”
(Al-Mujādilah, 58:7)

And He declares with intimate finality:

“Indeed, We created mankind, and We know what his soul whispers to him, and We are closer to him than his jugular vein.”
(Qāf, 50:16)

In strict accordance with the classical Hanafi-Maturidi tradition, these foundational texts must never be interpreted as indicating physical indwelling, bodily proximity, spatial diffusion, or material contact. Rather, the master verifiers of *Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jama’ah* systematically demonstrated that these verses describe the absolute perfection of divine omniscience and encompassing authority. Allah is not physically mixed with His creation (*al-imtizāj*), nor is He structurally distributed throughout the atoms of the universe.

The Metaphysics of Divine Nearness in the Maturidi School

Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi painstakingly explained in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* that divine nearness (*al-qurb*) is fundamentally distinct from the metrics of physical distance or spatial alignment. In the material world, closeness and distance are accidental properties (*a’rād*) that occur exclusively between composite bodies navigating a shared spatial medium.

Because Allah is the absolute creator of space, metrics, and physical intervals, His Essence transcends these material categories. He is near without physical proximity, exalted without directional orientation, and encompassing without acting as a physical enclosure or container.

This sophisticated understanding is beautifully illustrated when analysing the stylistic precision of the Quranic vocabulary. For instance, when Allah invites humanity to seek His presence, He declares:

“And when My servants ask you concerning Me, indeed I am near (*Qarīb*).”
(Al-Baqarah, 2:186)

Within Hanafi theological exegesis, this nearness is immediately qualified by its context as an immanence of universal mercy, swift responsiveness, flawless awareness, and divine care, completely detached from bodily location.

The Refutation of Spatial Diffusion

When literalist factions erroneously imagine that divine encompassment implies that Allah physically surrounds the universe like a massive spatial atmosphere, they lapse into the pantheistic errors of historical sects. Allah is not spread throughout creation, nor is He physically hosted within material objects.

The righteous predecessors (*al-Salaf al-Sālih*) maintained a flawless hermeneutical balance: they affirmed Allah’s intimate nearness and absolute encompassment to honor the text of revelation, while concurrently negating any connotation of bodily indwelling or spatial diffusion to safeguard *Tawhīd*.

Ultimately, the true meaning of divine encompassment demands that the believer hold two realities in perfect equilibrium: Allah is closer to all things through His infinite knowledge, flawless sight, and universal mercy, yet He remains utterly exalted above all things in His uncreated majesty and absolute transcendence. Having clarified that the Divine Essence is neither spatially distant nor physically ambient, we must next address the kinetic claims of corporealism—specifically, how the Absolute interacts with creation through the scriptural concepts of descent and ascension without undergoing physical movement.

The Synthesis of Encompassment and Transcendence

This chapter firmly establishes that scriptural expressions of divine closeness (*ma'iyyah*) and encompassment (*ihāṭah*) offer no refuge for corporealist imagination. By tracing these concepts through the rigorous lens of Hanafi-Maturidi hermeneutics, we have demonstrated that Allah's presence within the cosmos is an immanence of flawless omniscience, absolute authority, and uncreated power. To claim that Allah is "with" creation through physical contact or spatial diffusion is to commit the ultimate theological error of reducing the Creator to a composite entity bound by the very dimensions He brought into existence. True orthodoxy balances two unshakeable truths: Allah is intimately aware of the deepest recesses of creation, yet He remains entirely separate from and untouched by the material universe.

Ultimately, this equilibrium brings us back to the central thesis of this entire work: **Allah exists without a place**. If place were a necessity for the Divine Essence, then His absolute encompassment would reduce Him to a spatial container, or worse, render Him dependent upon the universe for His own existence. By proving that His nearness transcends physical coordinates, this chapter cements the reality that the Creator is entirely self-sufficient, untethered by boundaries, and completely free from physical location. Having clarified that the Divine Essence is neither spatially distant nor physically ambient, we must next address the kinetic claims of corporealism—specifically, how the Absolute interacts with creation through the scriptural concepts of descent and ascension without undergoing physical movement.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: THE PARADIGMS OF DESCENT AND ASCENSION: DISMANTLING THE KINETICS OF CORPOREALISM (AL-TANZĪH ‘AN AL-ḤARAKAH WAL-INTIQĀL)

A foundational principle of orthodox Sunni theology is that Allah Most High is described throughout revelation by the majestic names *Al-‘Alī* (The Most High) and *Al-A‘lā* (The Most Exalted). The scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama‘ah affirmed these attributes completely while clarifying that divine exaltedness refers to supremacy, perfection, authority, and majesty — not physical altitude, bodily elevation, or spatial location within the universe.

When literalist interpretations attempt to understand divine loftiness through physical direction and bodily movement, they inevitably reduce the Creator to the properties of created matter. This contradiction becomes especially apparent when examining the prophetic traditions concerning divine descent (*nuzūl*) and the scriptural accounts of celestial ascension.

The Hadith of Divine Descent (*Nuzūl*)

Among the most frequently cited narrations in this discussion is the famous hadith:

“Our Lord descends every night to the lowest heaven when the final third of the night remains and says: ‘Who is calling upon Me so that I may answer him? Who is asking from Me so that I may give him? Who is seeking My forgiveness so that I may forgive him?’”

(*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 1145; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 758)

Certain literalist groups interpret this narration according to bodily movement, imagining Allah physically descending from a higher location to a lower one.

However, this interpretation immediately collapses when examined alongside the realities of the physical world.

The Continuous Rotation of the Earth

Because the earth is spherical and constantly rotating, the final third of the night is always occurring somewhere on earth at every moment.

[CONTINUOUS ROTATION OF NIGHT]

Hemisphere A → Final Third of Night

Hemisphere B → Midday

Hemisphere C → Sunset

Hemisphere D → Dawn

Earth constantly rotating through time zones

If divine descent were interpreted as literal bodily movement, this would require Allah to remain in a perpetual state of continuous motion, endlessly descending and ascending according to shifting global time zones.

Such an interpretation would necessitate:

- continuous movement,
- perpetual relocation,
- changing spatial positions,
- and ongoing transition from one state to another.

These are all qualities of created bodies.

In classical theology, movement (ḥarakah) and relocation (intiḳāl) are accidental properties that occur only to material entities existing within space and time.

Whatever moves:

- occupies one place after leaving another,
- transitions between locations,
- and becomes subject to temporal progression.

Such qualities are impossible to attribute to Allah Most High.

The Sunni Understanding of Nuzūl

For this reason, the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah interpreted the hadith in a manner befitting Divine transcendence.

Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d. 333 AH) explains that the descent mentioned in the narration refers to:

- the descent of divine mercy,
- the special acceptance of supplication,
- the descent of angels,
- or the manifestation of divine forgiveness during those blessed hours.

This preserves the wording of revelation while protecting the Divine Essence from bodily movement and physical transition.

The Question of Celestial Ascension (al-Mi'rāj)

A similar contradiction appears when literalism is applied to the scriptural texts concerning ascension.

Allah says regarding Prophet Jesus عليه السلام:

“Rather, Allah raised him unto Himself.”

(Al-Nisā', 4:158)

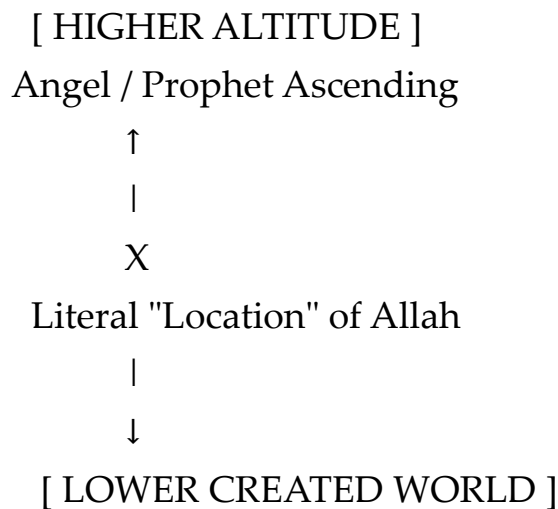
And Allah says regarding the angels:

“The angels and the Spirit ascend unto Him in a Day whose measure is fifty thousand years.”

(Al-Ma'ārij, 70:4)

If Allah were physically located at a fixed point above the universe, these texts would produce a severe logical paradox.

The Coordinate Paradox



If a created being continued ascending beyond a supposedly fixed divine location, then that created being would theoretically become “higher” than Allah in physical altitude.

Such an implication is clearly absurd and incompatible with divine supremacy.

For this reason, the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah affirmed that ascension refers to:

- elevation in honour,
- nearness in rank,
- spiritual proximity,
- and movement within creation itself.

The movement belongs entirely to the created being, not to Allah Most High.

Nearness to Allah is not achieved through physical distance or altitude, but through:

- obedience,
- worship,
- spiritual purification,
- and divine favour.

Divine Loftiness Without Physical Direction

The scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah therefore affirmed that Allah is:

- *Al-'Alī* without physical altitude,
- *Al-A'lā* without spatial elevation,
- and exalted without occupying direction or location.

Imam Abu Ja'far al-Tahawi (d. 321 AH) beautifully summarised this creed:

“He is beyond having limits placed on Him, or being restricted, or having parts or limbs. Nor is He contained by the six directions as all created things are.”

Likewise, Shaykh al-Islam Muhammad Zahid al-Kawthari رحمه الله strongly opposed all interpretations attributing bodily motion, spatial movement, or physical transition to Allah Most High, affirming that such notions contradict the transcendence established throughout the Qur'an, Sunnah, and classical Sunni theology.

Allah existed eternally before the creation of space, movement, time, and direction, and He remains exactly as He eternally was — Absolute, Supreme, Unchanging, and entirely transcendent above the laws governing created existence.

By extension, the trap of kinetic literalism lies in its inability to separate the majesty of divine interaction from the mechanics of creaturely motion. To argue that the Creator must physically travel through space to manifest His mercy or receive His creation is to mistake the arena of human experience for the reality of the Divine Essence. In the clear light of classical Sunni metaphysics, movement and rest are merely accidents born of spatial boundaries and temporal limitations. By purifying our understanding of both descent and ascension, orthodox theology frees the believer from the crude imagination of a localized deity shifting between cosmic coordinates, grounding our awe instead in a Lord whose presence is absolute and whose authority is unconfined.

It logically follows that the trajectories of the cosmos—whether the descending of the night or the ascending of prophets and angels—are journeys undertaken exclusively by the creation, not the Creator. The heavens move, the earth rotates, and created spirits travel, yet the Master of the universe remains entirely untouched by the laws of transition and physical displacement. Allah Most High rules over the shifting dimensions of time and space without ever being altered by them. He is now exactly as He was before motion and stillness were ever brought into existence—Unchanging, Supreme, and infinitely exalted above the cosmos; thus, **Allah exists without a place.**

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: THE BLUEPRINT OF ORTHODOX HERMENEUTICS: NAVIGATING DECISIVE AND ALLEGORICAL SCRIPTURE (QAWĀ'ID AL-FAHM FI AL-MUHĶAMĀT WAL- MUTASHĀBIHĀT)

As established throughout the preceding chapters of this work, a sound understanding of the Divine Attributes (Ṣifāt) depends upon adherence to the foundational principles of Qur'anic interpretation (Uṣūl al-Tafsīr). One of the greatest causes of anthropomorphic deviation (tajsīm) is the failure to distinguish between the clear and decisive verses (Muḥkamāt) and the allegorical or ambiguous verses (Mutashābihāt).

Allah Most High explicitly states:

“He it is Who has sent down upon thee the Book. In it are verses clear and decisive — they are the foundation of the Book — and others are allegorical (mutashābihāt). But those in whose hearts is deviation follow that which is allegorical, seeking discord and seeking its interpretation. None knows its ultimate interpretation except Allah. And those firmly grounded in knowledge say: ‘We believe in it; all of it is from our Lord.’”

(Āl ‘Imrān, 3:7)

This verse forms one of the foundational principles of orthodox Sunni theology. Allah Himself informs the believers that revelation contains both decisive and allegorical expressions. The clear verses establish the foundations of belief, while the ambiguous verses require careful interpretation consistent with those foundational principles.

For this reason, the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah consistently held that the decisive verse:

“There is absolutely nothing whatsoever like unto Him.”

(Al-Shūrā, 42:11)

serves as the governing interpretive principle for all ambiguous texts concerning the Divine Attributes.

Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d. 333 AH) explains in *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān* that whenever an ambiguous text outwardly appears to suggest bodily qualities, physical movement, or spatial limitation, it must never be interpreted according to crude literalism. Rather, it must be understood in a manner consistent with Divine transcendence (*tanzīh*).

The Necessity of Non-Literal Interpretation in Arabic Rhetoric

The Arabic language is rich with metaphor, symbolism, rhetorical expression, and figurative usage. The Qur'an itself frequently employs elevated rhetorical styles that cannot be understood according to simplistic literalism.

1. The Metaphor of the “Beautiful Loan”

Allah says:

“Who is it that will give Allah a beautiful loan?”

(Al-Baqarah, 2:245)

No Muslim understands this verse literally, for Allah is *al-Ghanī* — absolutely free of need. The verse does not imply poverty, financial dependence, or material deficiency. Rather, it is a powerful rhetorical expression encouraging believers toward charity and promising immense spiritual reward.

2. The Meaning of “Face” (Wajh)

Allah says:

“Everything shall perish except His Face.”

(Al-Qasas, 28:88)

The scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah never interpreted this as referring to a physical facial organ or bodily limb. Rather, in classical Arabic rhetoric, *wajh* often refers to the essence of a thing or that which is intended by it.

Accordingly, the scholars interpreted the verse as referring to:

- the Divine Essence (Dhāt),
- or deeds performed sincerely for Allah alone.

To interpret the verse literally as a bodily face would imply bodily composition and physical parts — qualities impossible to attribute to Allah Most High.

3. The Meaning of “Your Lord Comes”

Allah says:

“And your Lord comes...”

(Al-Fajr, 89:22)

Literalist groups interpret this verse as bodily movement and spatial arrival. However, the scholars clarified that the verse refers to:

- the manifestation of divine judgment,
- the execution of Allah’s command,
- or the appearance of His overwhelming authority on the Day of Judgment.

The movement belongs to creation and unfolding events — not to the Divine Essence.

Imam Abu Hanifah (d. 150 AH) and the classical scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah consistently rejected attributing movement, transition, or relocation to Allah Most High.

4. The Meaning of “The Hand of Allah”

Allah says:

“The Hand of Allah is above their hands.”

(Al-Fath, 48:10)

The scholars never understood this verse as affirming a bodily limb or physical hand; rather, the Arabic word *yad* frequently signifies power, authority, support, covenant, and protection. Consequently, the verse refers

specifically to the divine support and authority underlying the Pledge of Ridwān, rather than a bodily hand physically positioned above human hands.

The Methodologies of Tafwīd and Ta'wīl

To preserve both revelation and Divine transcendence, the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah adopted two orthodox methodologies regarding the mutashābih texts:

1. Tafwīd

Affirming the revealed wording while consigning the ultimate reality and modality to Allah Most High, without imagining bodily meaning.

2. Ta'wīl

Interpreting the text according to the recognised principles of Arabic language and rhetoric in a manner consistent with Divine transcendence.

Both methodologies share the same objective:

- affirming revelation,
- preserving tawhīd,
- and negating corporeal resemblance from Allah Most High.

The righteous predecessors (al-Salaf al-Sālih) utilised both approaches while unanimously rejecting anthropomorphism and bodily comparison.

The Danger of Hyper-Literalism

Crude literalism represents a profound theological danger. A person may believe they are honouring revelation while unknowingly constructing a material image of Allah within the mind.

By reducing the Infinite Creator to the qualities of finite bodies, spatial direction, movement, and physical limitation, the foundations of tawhīd become compromised.

For this reason, Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH) famously stated:

“Whatever form or image occurs in your mind, Allah is fundamentally unlike it.”

Likewise, Shaykh al-Islam Muhammad Zahid al-Kawthari رحمه الله repeatedly warned against hyper-literalist readings of the Divine Attributes, emphasising that the methodology of Ahl al-Sunnah preserves both the sanctity of revelation and the transcendence of the Divine Essence.

Ultimately, sound creed (‘aqīdah) safeguards the believer from both anthropomorphism and denial. The orthodox Muslim affirms every perfection that Allah and His Messenger ﷺ affirmed while maintaining with certainty that Allah Most High is entirely transcendent above place, direction, bodily form, movement, limitation, and physical resemblance.

Allah existed eternally before the creation of the cosmos without place or direction, and after creating the universe, He remains exactly as He eternally was — Absolute, Transcendent, and utterly unlike creation.

In the final analysis, the foundational crisis of anthropomorphism is not born from a desire to respect scripture, but from a profound failure to comprehend the expansive horizons of Arabic rhetoric. To superimpose crude, material literalism onto the symbolic and majestic expressions of revelation is to treat the transcendent speech of the Almighty as though it were a mundane ledger of physical descriptions. In the light of classical Sunni hermeneutics, the decisive verses serve as an unbending anchor for the intellect, ensuring that the ambiguous text is never allowed to drift into the treacherous waters of corporeal projection. By distinguishing between the literal and the figurative, orthodox theology honors the text while preserving the absolute incomparability of the Author.

Consequently, the methodologies of both *Tafwīd* and *Ta’wīl* stand as a twin fortress guarding the purity of Islamic monotheism. They ensure that the human mind does not fall into the psychological trap of creating a localized deity shaped by the limits of our sensory experiences. The expressions of

hands, faces, arrival, and ascent are keys to unlocking spiritual awe, not invitations to measure the Boundless with creaturely dimensions. The sound intellect must look through the windows of rhetoric to witness the reality of Divine majesty, remaining firmly anchored in the timeless truth that **Allah exists without a place.**

CONCLUSION

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of the Worlds. May the most perfect peace, blessings, and honours abide upon our master Muhammad ﷺ, his noble family, his righteous companions, and all those who steadfastly follow the path of truth until the Final Day.

The purpose of this treatise was never to encourage speculative curiosity concerning the unfathomable Divine Essence (Dhāt) of Allah Most High, nor to indulge in unnecessary polemics. Rather, this work was written as a defence of the pristine creed (‘aqīdah) of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama‘ah and as a clarification of Divine transcendence (tanzīh) in an age increasingly affected by anthropomorphic confusion and hyper-literalist interpretation.

Across the preceding fifteen chapters, this work has sought to establish — through both scriptural (naqlī) and rational (‘aqlī) evidence — that Allah Most High exists entirely free from place (makān), direction (jihah), bodily form, movement (ḥarakah), limitation, dimension, and physical confinement. Allah existed eternally before the creation of the heavens, the earth, the Throne (al-‘Arsh), space, and time. Because His Divine Essence is eternal and immutable, the creation of the universe did not alter Him in any way. The One Who existed before place remains entirely unconfined by place after its creation.

This work has further demonstrated that change (taghayyur), movement, dimensionality, and spatial orientation are all qualities belonging exclusively to contingent creation. Physical motion is a property of bodies. Boundaries imply limitation. Direction implies confinement. Dependency belongs only to

created things. Allah Most High is eternally exalted above all such imperfections.

For this reason, every ambiguous scriptural expression must be understood through the decisive Qur'anic principle:

“There is absolutely nothing whatsoever like unto Him, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing.”

(*Al-Shūrā*, 42:11)

By anchoring ourselves to this definitive verse, the believer is protected from both extremes:

- stripping the Divine Attributes of meaning altogether (ta'tīl),
- and reducing Allah to the likeness of creation (tashbīh).

As demonstrated throughout this work, the Qur'an itself demands a careful and sophisticated interpretive methodology. The Arabic language is rich with metaphor, rhetoric, symbolic expression, and elevated modes of speech. Those who approach the mutashābih texts through crude literalism inevitably fall into theological confusion.

By contrast, the scholars of the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and orthodox Hanbali traditions approached these texts with reverence, humility, and intellectual discipline. Through the methodologies of tafwīd and ta'wīl, they preserved both the sanctity of revelation and the absolute transcendence of Allah Most High.

This balanced methodology unites the intellectual legacy of the great scholars of Sunni orthodoxy, foremost among them:

- Imam Abu Hanifah,
- Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi,
- Imam Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari,
- Imam Abu Ja'far al-Tahawi,
- Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali,
- and Al-Bayhaqi.

These scholars recognised that anthropomorphism (tajsīm) is not merely an intellectual error, but a profound spiritual danger. By imagining Allah through bodily form, spatial direction, or physical limitation, a person unknowingly constructs a created image within the mind and projects it onto the Divine Essence.

For this reason, Muhammad Zahid al-Kawthari رحمه الله devoted tremendous effort toward defending the creed of transcendence and exposing the dangers of corporealist thought.

Ultimately, the believer must understand that:

- Allah's exaltedness (al-'Uluww) is an exaltedness of majesty, dominion, and perfection — not physical altitude.
- His nearness (al-Qurb) is a nearness of knowledge, mercy, and response — not bodily proximity.
- His encompassment (al-Ihāṭah) is an encompassment of authority, power, and knowledge — not physical enclosure or spatial diffusion.

This subject is not merely a dry theological exercise. Sound creed (‘aqīdah) forms the foundation of worship (‘ibādah), sincerity (ikhlās), humility, and spiritual purification (tazkiyah). A heart that truly understands the majesty and transcendence of Allah is liberated from material imagination and filled with reverence for the Lord of the heavens and the earth.

When stripped of literalist rhetoric, the journey through these pages reveals that preserving traditional Sunni creed is not merely an exercise in academic debate, but an essential act of spiritual liberation. To free the heart from the constraints of material imagination is to allow the soul to truly worship the Creator as He is, rather than worshiping an idol manufactured by human estimation. The landmarks of creation—the earth, the heavens, and the magnificent Throne—exist to direct our servitude upward in awe, not to serve as a cosmic ceiling for the One who brought them into being out of nothingness. By steadfastly maintaining the boundary between the Maker and the made, the believer arrives at the very pinnacle of pure monotheism, where the intellect surrenders to divine majesty and the heart finds rest in absolute truth.

It logically follows that this work leaves the seeker with a definitive, unyielding fortress against the shifting winds of theological confusion. The timeless legacy of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah* remains an unbroken chain of clarity, proving that true reverence lies in exalting the Almighty above the limitations of change, motion, and spatial dependency. As the believer closes this treatise and turns toward the *Qiblah* of worship, the mind stands purified of corporeal projection, and the soul rests securely upon the foundational, eternal axiom that underpins all sound reality: **Allah exists without a place.**

I ask Allah Most High to forgive any shortcomings within this humble effort, to make it sincerely for His Noble Countenance, and to render it a source of benefit for those seeking truth and clarity.

May Allah preserve the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah, strengthen the believers upon sound tawhīd, and protect us from deviation, anthropomorphism, and theological confusion.

May the most abundant peace and blessings forever abide upon our master Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, his noble family, his righteous companions, and all those who faithfully follow their path until the Final Day.

وَأَخِرُ دَعْوَانَا أَنْ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

APPENDIX A: INDEX OF QUR'ANIC VERSES REFERENCED

1. Surah Al-Baqarah (2:115)

وَلِلَّهِ الْمَشْرِقُ وَالْمَغْرِبُ ۚ فَأَيْنَمَا تُوَلُّوا فَثَمَّ وَجْهُ اللَّهِ

“And to Allah belongs the east and the west. So wherever you turn, there is the Face of Allah.”

2. Surah Al-Baqarah (2:186)

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ

“And when My servants ask you concerning Me, indeed I am near.”

3. Surah Al-Baqarah (2:245)

مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يُقْرِضُ اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا

“Who is it that will give Allah a beautiful loan?”

4. Surah Āl ‘Imrān (3:7)

فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ

“As for those in whose hearts is deviation, they follow that which is allegorical from it, seeking discord and seeking its interpretation.”

5. Surah Āl ‘Imrān (3:190)

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لَآيَاتٍ لِّأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ

“Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and day are signs for people of understanding.”

6. Surah Al-Nisā’ (4:126)

وَكَانَ اللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ مُّحِيطًا

“And Allah encompasses all things.”

7. Surah Al-Nisā’ (4:158)

بَلْ رَفَعَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَيْهِ

“Rather, Allah raised him unto Himself.”

8. Surah Al-An‘ām (6:59)

وَمَا تَسْقُطُ مِنْ وَرَقَةٍ إِلَّا يَعْلَمُهَا

“And not a leaf falls except that He knows it.”

9. Surah Al-An‘ām (6:76–78)

لَا أُحِبُّ الْآفِلِينَ

“I do not love those that vanish.”

10. Surah Tā Hā (20:5)

الرَّحْمَنُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَى

“The Most Merciful made istiawā over the Throne.”

11. Surah Tā Hā (20:7)

وَيَعْلَمُ السِّرَّ وَالْأَخْفَى

“He knows the secret and what is even more hidden.”

12. Surah Al-Anbiyā’ (21:107)

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

“And We have not sent you except as a mercy to all the worlds.”

13. Surah Al-Qaṣaṣ (28:88)

كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ

“Everything shall perish except His Face.”

14. Surah Al-Zumar (39:62)

اللَّهُ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ

“Allah is the Creator of all things.”

15. Surah Al-Zumar (39:67)

وَالسَّمَاوَاتُ مَطْوِيَّاتٌ بِيَمِينِهِ

“And the heavens will be folded in His right hand.”

16. Surah Al-Shūrā (42:11)

لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ

“There is absolutely nothing whatsoever like unto Him, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing.”

17. Surah Qāf (50:16)

وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ

“And We are closer to him than his jugular vein.”

18. Surah Qāf (50:38)

وَمَا مَسَّنَا مِنْ لُغُوبٍ

“And no fatigue whatsoever touched Us.”

19. Surah Al-Ḥadīd (57:3)

هُوَ الْأَوَّلُ وَالْآخِرُ وَالظَّاهِرُ وَالْبَاطِنُ

“He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden.”

20. Surah Al-Ḥadīd (57:4)

وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ

“And He is with you wherever you are.”

21. Surah Al-Mujādilah (58:7)

إِلَّا هُوَ مَعَهُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كَانُوا

“Except that He is with them wherever they may be.”

22. Surah Al-Ma'ārij (70:4)

تَعْرُجُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ إِلَيْهِ

“The angels and the Spirit ascend unto Him.”

23. Surah Al-A'la (87:1)

سَبِّحْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَى

“Glorify the Name of your Lord, the Most High.”

24. Surah Al-Fajr (89:22)

وَجَاءَ رَبُّكَ

“And your Lord came [i.e. His command and judgment].”

25. Surah Al-Ikhlās (112:1–4)

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ ۝ اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ ۝ لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ ۝ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ

“Say: He is Allah, the One. Allah, the Self-Sufficient Master. He neither begets nor is begotten. And there is none comparable unto Him.”